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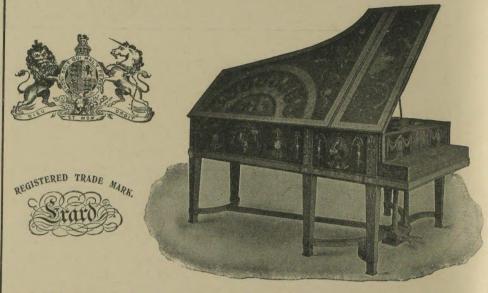
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A CHRISTMAS FREEBOOTER.

DRAWN BY R. CATON WOODVILLE.



AN OLD COACHING CHRISTMAS: "SHE'S THROUGH!"

Drawn by Fleming Williams.



A NEW MOTORING CHRISTMAS: HORSE-FLESH TO THE RESCUE!

DRAWN BY PERCY F. S. SPENCE.



CHARITY AT THE CHRISTMAS FEAST.

DRAWN BY LUCIEN DAVIS, R.I.



His kiss for the last time.

SHE stood at her low window, with its uneven, wavering glass, and looked out across the prairie. A little snow had fallen — not much, only enough to add a sense of desolation to the boundless plain, the infinite plain outside the four cramped walls of her log hut. The log hut was

like a tiny boat moored in some vast, tideless, impassable sea. The immensity of the prairie had crushed her in the earlier years of her married life; but gradually she had become accustomed to it, then reconciled to it; at last, almost a part of it. The grey had come early to her thick hair; a certain fixity to the quiet courage of her eyes. Her calm, steadfast face showed that she was not given to depression; but, nevertheless, this evening, as she stood watching for her husband's return, for the first distant speck of him where the cart-rut vanished into the plain, a sense of impending misfortune enfolded her with the dusk. Was it because the first snow had fallen? Ah me! How much it meant! It was as significant for her as the grey pallor that falls on a sick man's face. It meant the endless winter, the greater isolation instead of the lesser, the powerlessness to move hand or foot in that all-enveloping shroud—the struggle, not for existence (with him beside her that was assured), not for luxury (she had ceased to care for it, though he had not ceased to care, for her sake), but for life in any but its narrowest sense. Books, letters, human speech, through the long months these would be almost entirely denied her. The sudden remembrance of the larger needs of life flooded her soul, touching to momentary semblance of movement many things long cherished, but long since dead, like delicate sea-plants beyond high-water mark, that cannot exist between the long droughts when the neap-tide does not come. She had known what she was doing when, against the wishes of her family, she of the South had married him of the North, when she left the busy city life she knew and clave to her husband, following him over the rim of the world, as women will follow while they have feet to follow with. She was superior to her husband in birth, cultivation, refinement; but she had never regretted what she had done. The regrets were his for her, for the poverty to which he had brought her and to which she had not been accustomed. She had only one regret (if such a thin strip of a

THE HAND ON THE LATCH.

By MARY CHOLMONDELEY. Illustrated by F. H. TOWNSEND.

word as regret can be used to describe her passionate controlled desolation, immense as the prairie)—because she had no child. Perhaps if they had had children the walls of the log hut in the waste might have closed in on them less rigidly. It might have become more of a home:

Her mind had taken its old mechanical bent, the trend of long habit as she looked out from that low window. How often she had stood there and thought: "If only we might have had a child!" and now by sheer force of habit she thought it yet again. And then a slow rapture took possession of her whole being, mounted, mounted till she leaned against the windowsill faint with joy. She was to have a child after all. She had hardly dared believe it at first, but as time had gone on a vague hope, quickly suppressed as unbearable, had turned to suspense; suspense had alternated with the fierce despair that precedes certainty. Certainty had come at last, clear and calm and exquisite as dawn. She would have a child in the spring. What was the winter to her now! Nothing but a step towards joy. The world was all broken up, and made new. The prairie, its great loneliness, its deathlike solitude, were gone out of her life. She was to have a child in the spring. She had not dared to tell her husband till she was sure. But she would tell him this evening, when they were sitting together over the fire.

She stood motionless in the deepening dusk, trying to be calm. And at last, in the far distance, she saw a speck arise as it were out of a crease in the level earth. Her husband on his horse. How many hundreds of times she had seen him appear over the rim of the world, just as he was appearing now! She lit the lamp and put it in the window. She blew the log fire to a blaze. The firelight danced on the wooden walls crowded with cheap pictures, and on the few precious daguerreotypes that reminded her she too had brothers and sisters and kin of her own, far away in one of those Southern cities where the war was still smouldering grimly on.

Her husband took his horse round and stalled him. Presently he came in. They stood a moment together in silence, as their custom was, and she leaned her forehead against his shoulder. Then she busied herself with his supper, and he sat down heavily at the little table. "Had you any difficulty this time in getting the money together?" she asked.

Her husband was a rent-collector.

"None," he said abstractedly. "At least, yes—a little. But I have it all, and the arrears as well. It makes a large sum."

He was evidently thinking of something else. She did not speak again. She saw his mind was troubled.

"I heard news to-day at Phillips'," he said at last, "which I don't like. If I had heard in time, and if I could have borrowed a fresh horse, I would have ridden straight on to —. But it was too late in the day to be safe, and you would have been anxious what had become of me if I had been out all night with all this money on me. I shall go to-morrow as soon as it is light."

They discussed the business which took him to the nearest town, thirty miles away, where their small savings were invested—somewhat precariously, as it turned out. What was safe, who was safe, while the invisible war between North and South smouldered on and on? It had not come near them; but as an earthquake which is engulfing cities in one part of Europe will rattle a tea-cup without over-setting it on a cottage shelf half a continent away, so the Civil War had reached them at last.

"I take a hopeful view," he said; but his face was overcast. "I don't see why we should lose the little we have. It has been hard enough to scrape it together. Promptitude and joint action with Reynolds will probably save it. But I must be prompt." He still spoke abstractedly, as if even now he were thinking of something else.

He began to take out of a leather satchel various bags of money.

"Shall I help you to count it?"

She often did so.

They counted the flimsy, dirty paper-money together, and put it all back into the various labelled bags.

"It comes right," he said.

Suddenly she said, "But you can't pay it into the bank to-morrow if you

"I know," he said, looking at her; "that is what I have been thinking of ever since I heard Phillips' news. I don't like leaving you with all this money in the house, but I must."

She was silent. She was not frightened for herself; she was not nervous, as he was; but she had always shared with him a certain dread of those bulging bags, and had always been thankful to see him return safe—he never went twice by the same track—after paying the money in. In those wild days, when men went armed, with their lives in their hands, it was not well to be known to have large sums about you.

He looked at the bags, frowning.

"I am not afraid," she said.

"There is no real need to be," he said, after a moment. "When I leave to-morrow morning it will be thought I have gone to pay it in. Still—"

He did not finish his sentence, but she knew what was in his mind—the great loneliness of the prairie. Out in the white night came the short, sharp yap of a wolf.

"I am not afraid," she said again.

"I shall only be gone one night," he said.

"I have often been a night alone."

"I know, but somehow it's worse leaving you with so much money in the house."

"No one knows it will be there."

"That is true," he said, "except that everyone knows I have been collecting large sums."

"They will think you have gone to pay it in, as usual."

"Yes," he said, with an effort.

Then he got up, and went to his tool-box. She watched him open it, seeing him in a new light, which encompassed him with even greater love. "If I tell him to-night," she thought, "it will make him far more anxious about leaving me. Perhaps he would refuse to go, and he must go. I will not tell him till he comes back."

The resolution not to speak was like taking hold of a piece of iron in frost. She had not known it would hurt so much. A new tremulousness, sweet and strange, passed over her—not cowardice, not fear, not of the heart nor of the mind, but a sort of emotion of the whole being.

"I will not tell him," she said again.

Her husband got out his tools, took up a plank from the floor, and put the money into a hole beneath it, beside their small valuables, such as they were, in a biscuit-tin. Then he replaced the plank, screwed it down, and she laid a small fur mat over the place. He put back the tools and then came and stood in front of her. He was not conscious of his transfiguration, and she dropped her eyes for fear of showing it.

"I shall start early," he said; "as soon as it is light; and I shall be back before sundown the day after to-morrow. I know it is unreasonable, but I shall go easier in my mind if you will promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Not to go out of the house or let anyone else come in on any pretence whatever while I am away," he said. "Bar everything, and stay inside."

"I shan't want to go out."

He made an impatient movement.

"Promise me that, come what will, you will let no one in during my absence," he said.

"I promise."

"Swear it."

She hesitated.

"Swear it to please me," he said.

"I swear that I will let no one into the house, on any pretext whatever, until you come back," she said, smiling at him.

He sighed, and relapsed into his chair, and gave way to the great fatigue that possessed him.

The next morning he started soon after daybreak, but not until he had brought her in sufficient fuel to last several days. There had been more snow in the night—fine snow, like salt—but not enough to make travelling difficult. She watched him ride away, and silenced the voice within her which always said as she saw him go, "You will never see him again. You have heard his voice for the last time." Perhaps, after all, the difference between the brave and the cowardly lies in how they deal with that voice. Both hear it. She silenced it instantly. It spoke again more insistently. "You have heard his voice, felt his kiss, for the last time. He will never see the face of his child." She silenced it again and went about her work.

The day passed as countless other days had passed. She was accustomed to be much alone. She had work to do—enough and to spare—within the little home which was to become a real home, please God, in the spring. The evening fell almost before she expected it. She locked and barred the doors, and closed the shutters of the windows. She made all secure, as she had done many a time before.

And then, putting aside her work, she took down the newest of her well-worn books, lately sent her from New Orleans, and began to read.

Oui, sans doute, tout meurt; ce monde est un grand rêve, Et le peu de bonheur qui nous vient en chemin, Nous n'avons pas plus tôt ce roseau dans la main, Que le vent nous l'enlève.

Que le vent nous l'enlève. She repeated the last words to herself. Ah no. The wind could not take her happiness out of her hand.

A wandering wind had risen at nightfall, and it came softly across the snow, and tried the doors and windows as with a furtive hand. She could hear it coming as from an immense distance, passing with a sigh, returning plaintive, homeless, forlorn, to whisper round the house.

J'ai vu sous le soleil tomber bien d'autres choses Que les feuilles des bois, et l'écume des eaux, Bien d'autres s'en aller que le parfum des roses Et le chant des oiseaux.

That wind meant more snow. Involuntarily she laid down her book and listened to it. How like the sound of the wind was to wandering footsteps, slowly drawing near, creeping round the house! She could almost have fancied that a hand touched the shutters, was even now trying to raise the latch of the door.

A moment of intense silence, in which the wind seemed to hold its breath and listen without, while she listened within. And then a low, distinct knock upon the door. She did not move.

"It is the wind," she said to herself; but she knew it was not.

The knock came again; low, urgent, not to be denied.

She had become very cold. She had supposed fear was an emotion of the mind. She had not reckoned for this slow paralysis of the body. She managed to creep to the window and unbar the shutter an inch or two. By pressing her face against the extreme corner of the pane she could just discern in the snowlight part of a man's figure, wrapped in a long cloak.

She barred the window once more. She was not surprised. She knew now that she had known it always. She had pretended to herself that the thief would not come; but she was expecting him when he knocked. And he stood there outside. Presently he would be inside.

He knocked yet again, this time more loudly. What need was there for silence when, for miles and miles round, there was no ear to hear save that of a chance prairie dog?

She laid hold upon her courage, seeing that it was her only refuge, and went to the door.

"Who is there?" she said through a chink.

A man's voice, low and feeble, replied, "Let me in."

"I cannot let you in."

There was a short silence.

"I pray you let me in," he said again.

"I have told you I cannot. Who are you?"

"I am a soldier, wounded. I'm trying to get back to my friends at ——." He mentioned a settlement about fifty miles north. "I have missed my way, and I can't drag myself any further."

Her heart swung violently between suspicion and compassion.

"I am alone in the house," she said. "My husband is away, and he made me promise not to let anyone in, on any pretence whatever, during his absence."

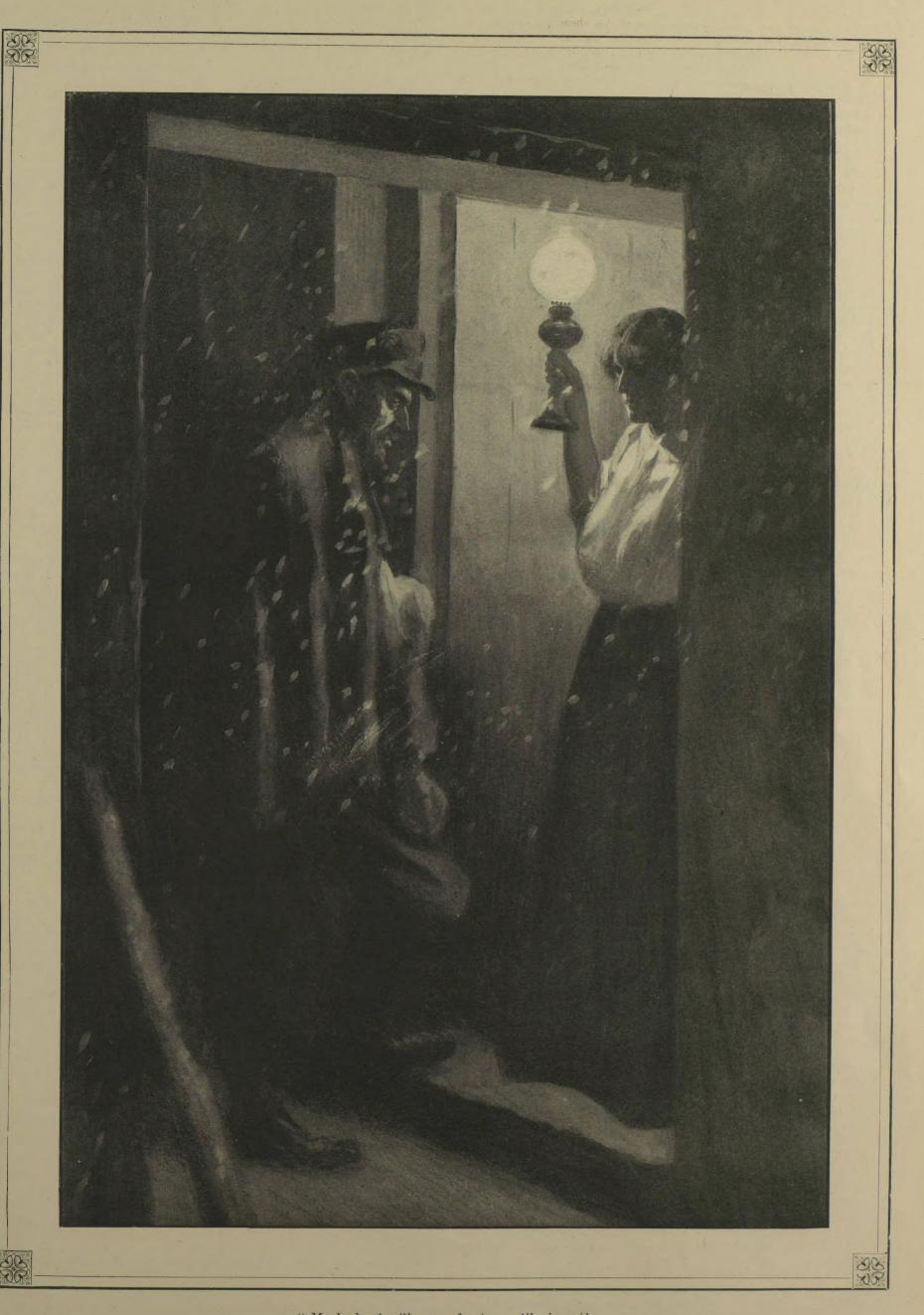
"Then I shall die on your doorstep," said the voice. "I can't drag myself any further."

There was another silence.

"It is beginning to snow," he said.

"I know," she said; and he heard the trouble in her voice.

"Open the door and look at me," he said, "and see if I can do you any harm."



"My husband will never forgive me!" she said
"THE HAND ON THE LATCH."—BY MARY CHOLMONDELEY.

She opened the door and stood on the threshold, barring the way He was leaning against the door-post with his head against it, as she had often seen her husband lean when he was talking to her on a summer evening. Something in his attitude, so like her husband's, touched her strangely. Supposing he were in need and pleaded for help

The man turned his face towards her. It was sunk and hollow, ravaged with pain an evil-looking face. His right arm was in a sling under his tattered military cloak. He seemed to have made his final effort, and now stood staring dumbly at her.

"My husband will never forgive me," she said, with a sort of sob

He said nothing more. He seemed at the last point of exhaustion. Through the dim white night a few flakes of snow fell upon his harsh, repellent face, and on his bandaged arm.

A sudden wave of pity carried all before it. She beckoned him into the house and locked and barred the door. She put him in her husband's chair by the fire. He hardly noticed anything. He seemed stupefied. He sat staring alternately at the fire and at her. When she asked him to which regiment he belonged he did not answer.

She set before him the supper she had prepared for herself, and chafed his hard, emaciated, dirty hand till the warmth returned to it. Then he ate, with difficulty at first, then with slow voracity, all she had put before him.

A semblance of life returned gradually to him.

"I was pretty near done up when I knocked," he said several times.

She dressed his wound, which did not appear very deep, wrapped it in fresh bandages, and readjusted his sling. He took it all as a matter of course.

She made up a little bed of rugs and blankets for him in the back kitchen. When she came back to the living-room she found he had dragged himself to his feet, and was looking vacantly at a little picture of President Lincoln on the mantelshelf. She showed him the bed and told him to lie down on it. He obeyed her implicitly, like a child. She left

him, and presently heard him cast himself down. A few minutes later she went to the door and listened. His heavy, regular breathing told her he was asleep.

She went back to the kitchen and sat down by the fire.

Was he really asleep? Was it all feigned-the wound, the story, the exhaustion? Had she been trapped? Oh, what had she done! what had she done!

She seemed like two people. One self silent, alert, experienced, fearless, knew that she had allowed herself to be deluded in spite of being warned, knew that her feelings had been played upon, made use of, not even dexterously made use of; knew that she had disobeyed her husband, broken her solemn oath to him, plunged him with herself into disgrace if the money were stolen. And in the eyes of that self it was already stolen. It was still under the plank beneath her feet, but it was already stolen.

The other self, emotional, inconsequent, full of irresistible tenderness for suffering and weakness, even in its uncouthest garb, said incessantly-

"I could do no less. If I die for it, still I could do no less. Somebody brought him into the world. Some woman cried for joy and anguish when he was born. He would have died if I had not taken him in. I could do no less."

Through the long hours she sat by the fire, unable to reconcile herself to going upstairs to her own room, and to bed.

Once she got up and noiselessly took down her husband's revolver from the mantelshelf, and examined it. He had taken its fellow with him. and apparently, contrary to his custom, he had taken the powder-flask with him too, for it was gone from its nail. The revolvers were

always kept loaded, but - by some evil chance—the one that remained was unloaded. She could have sworn she had seen her husband load it two days ago. Why was this numbness creeping over her again? She got out powder and bullets from a small store she had of her own, loaded and primed the revolver, and laid it on the

come very still. Her hearing seemed to reach out till she felt she could have heard a cayute move in its hole miles away. The log fire creaked and shifted. The tall clock in the corner ticked, catching its chain now and then as its manner was. The wooden walls shrunk and groaned a little. The small home-like sounds only accentuated the enormous silence without. Suddenly, in the midst of them, a real sound fell upon her ear; very low, but different, not like the fragmentary inadvertent murmur of the hut; a small, purposeful, stealthy sound, aware of itself. She listened as she had listened before, without moving. It was not louder than the whittling of a mouse behind the wainscot, hardly louder than the scraping of a mole's thin hand in the soil. It continued. Then it stopped. It was only her foolish fancy after all. There it was again! Where did it come from?

The man in the

She took up the lamp and crept down the narrow passage to the door of the back kitchen. His loud, even breathing sounded

table beside her. The night had be-

next room?

distinctly through the crannies of the ill-fitting door. Surely it was over-loud! She listened to it. She could hear nothing else. Was his breathing a pretence? She opened the door noiselessly and went in, shading the light with her hand.

She bent over the sleeping man. At the first glance her heart sank, for he had not taken off his boots. But as she looked hard at him her suspicions died within her. He lay on his back, with his coarse, emaciated face towards her, his mouth open, showing his broken teeth. The sleep of utter exhaustion was upon him. She could have killed him as he lay. He was not acting. He was really asleep.

She crept out of the room again, leaving the door ajar, and went back to the kitchen.

Hardly had she sat down when she heard the sound again. It was too faint to reach her except when she was in the kitchen. She knew now where it came from—the door. Someone was picking the lock.



Listening to the furtive pick, pick, of someone at the lock.

The instant the sleeping man was out of her sight she suspected him again.

Was he really asleep after all? He had not taken off his boots. When she came back from making his bed she had found him standing by the mantelshelf. Had he unloaded the revolver in her absence? Would he presently get up and open the door to his confederates?

Her mind rose clear and cold and unflinching. She took up the revolver and then laid it down again. She wanted a less noisy weapon. She got out her husband's great clasp-knife from the open tool-box, took the lamp, and crept back to the man's bedside. She should be able to kill him. Certainly she should be able to kill him; and then she

should have the revolver for the other one.

But he still slept heavily. When she saw him again, again her suspicions fell from her. She *knew* he was asleep.

She shook him by the shoulder noise-lessly, but with increasing violence, until he opened his eyes with a groan. Then only she remembered that she was shaking his wounded arm. He saw the knife in her hand, and raised his left arm as if to ward off the blow.

"Listen," she whispered close to his ear. "Don't speak. There is a man trying to break into the house! You must get up and help me."

He stared at her, vaguely at first, but with growing intelligence. The food and sleep had restored him somewhat to himself. He sat up on the couch.

"Take off my boots," he whispered.
"I tried, and could not."

Her last suspicion of him vanished. She cut the laces with her knife, and dragged his boots off. They stuck to his feet, and bits of the woollen socks came off with them. They had evidently not been taken off for weeks. While she did it he whispered, "Why should anyone be wanting to break in? There's nothing here to take."

"Yes, there is," she said. "There is a lot of money."

"Good Lord! Where?"

"Under the floor in the kitchen."

"Then it's the kitchen they'll make for. You bet they know where the money is if they know it's here. Are there many of 'em?"

"I don't know."

"Well, we shall know soon enough," said the man—he had become alert, keen. "Have you any firearms?"

"Yes, one."

"Fetch it; but don't make a sound, mind."

She stole away, and returned with the revolver. She would have put it into his hand, but he pushed it away.

"It's no use to me," he said, "with my right arm in a sling. I will see what I can do with my left hand and the knife. Can you shoot?"

" Yes."

"Can you hit anything?"

"Yes."

"To be depended on?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's darned lucky! How long will that door hold?"

They were both in the little passage by now, pressed close together, listening to the furtive pick, pick, of someone at the lock.

"I don't think it will hold more than a minute."

"Now, look here," he said, "I shall go and stand at the foot of the stair, and knife the second man if there is a second. The first man I'll leave to you. There's a bit of light outside from the snow. He'll let in enough light to see him by as he opens the door. Don't wait. Fire at him as he comes in, and don't stop; go on firing at him till he drops. You've

got six bullets. Don't you make any mistake and shoot me. I've had enough of that already. Now, you look carefully where I'm going to stand, and when I'm there you put out the lamp."

He spoke to her as a man does to his comrade. That she could be frightened did not seem to enter his calculations. He moved with cat-like stealth to the foot of the tiny staircase and flattened himself against the wall. Then he stretched his left arm once or twice as if to make sure of it. licked the haft of the knife, and nodded at her.

She instantly put out the lamp.

All was dark save for a faint thread of light which outlined the door. Across the thread something moved—once, twice. The sound of picking ceased. Then another sound succeeded it—a new one, unlike the last, as if something were being gently prized open, wrenched.

"The bar will hold," she said to herself; and then remembered for the first time that the rung into which the bar slid had been loose these many days. It was giving now.

It had given!

The door opened silently, and a man came in. For a moment she saw him clear, with the accomplice snow-light behind him. She did not hesitate. She shot, once and again. He fell, and struggled violently up, and she shot again. He fell, and dragged himself to his knees; and she shot again.

Then he sank gently and slowly down, as if tired, with his face against the wall, and moved no more.

The man on the stairs rushed out, and looked through the open door.
"By G—, he was single-handed!" he said. Then he stooped over

the prostrate man and turned him over on his back.
"Dead!" he said, chuckling. "Well done, Missus! Stone dead!"
He was masked.

The dirty left hand tore the mask callously from the grey face.

The woman had drawn near and looked over his shoulder.

"Do you know him?" said the man.

For a moment she did not answer; and the revolver, which had done its work so well, dropped noisily out of her palsied hand.

"He is a stranger to me," she said, looking fixedly at her husband's fading face.

THE END.



"He is a stranger to me," she said, looking fixedly at her husband's fading face.



"ARE YOU FATHER CHRISTMAS?"—A TRUE INCIDENT.

DRAWN BY A. FORESTIER.



MISTLETOE.

Drawn by Marcella Walker.



HER GLIMPSE INTO THE PALACE BEAUTIFUL: HANS ANDERSEN'S "LITTLE MATCH-SELLER."

DRAWN BY N. SANSOM.

"She lighted another match, and then she found herself sitting under a beautiful Christmas tree. It was larger and more beautifully decorated than the one she had seen through the glass door at the rich merchant's. Thousands of tapers were burning upon the green branches, and coloured pictures, like those she had seen in the show-windows, looked down upon it all. The little one stretched out her hand towards them, and the match went out."



She joked and laughed with the captains and supercargoes.

I was years ago that he came to Uvea (said little Nofo, as we sat side by side on a derelict spar and watched the sun go down into the lagoon)—years and years and years ago, when I was an unthinking child and knew naught of men nor their crooked hearts. He was a chief,

of wild and strange appearance, with a black beard half covering his pig-like face; a thin, bent, elderly chief, with hairy hands and a head on which there was nothing at all, and teeth so loose in his mouth that at night he laid them in a cup beside him. He was landed from a ship that forthwith sailed and was never seen again; he and three tents and a boat and innumerable boxes, all numbered from one to a thousand, and a nigger named Billy Hindoo to care for him and cook.

The Government gave him a piece of land next the lagoon, where he pitched his tents and lived; and they put a taboo round the land so that none might cross, and also a notice on a board, saying, "Be careful of the white man." Here he unpacked his things and arranged a place for Billy Hindoo, and another place, open at the sides, where at a table he was daily served with sardines and bottled beer. He was named Professor, and his occupation, unlike that of all other white men, was to look at dead fish through bits of glass. He was a man of no kindness nor accomplishments, meanly solitary, and, in spite of two pairs of spectacles worn the one on the other, he was almost blind besides. Were you to come near him he would scream out, "No, no"; were you even to touch his bits of glass, or finger his sticky shadow-pictures in the pool, he would run at you crying, "No, no"; were you to approach him as he bathed in the lagoon, marvelling at his unsightliness, he would beat the water like one delirious and scream again, "No, no." So, in time, his name became changed from Professor into No No, or, as many called him in one word, Professor No No; and we all grew to hate him, as did also Billy Hindoo, who was generous and loving, and gave away unstintedly sardines and biscuit to those he favoured.

But Professor No No, unexpectedly returning in his boat with a new dead fish no bigger than that (a fish, too, of so little worth that one couldn't eat it without feeling ill for the succeeding week), discovered Billy Hindoo

PROFESSOR NO NO.

By LLOYD OSBOURNE.

Illustrated by GORDON BROWNE.

girls with whom he had made friends. The rage of Professor No No was without limit, and he ran at Billy Hindoo, and choked him with his hairy hands and beat him over the body with a stick, and drove him away with execrations. Then he sat down

dividing a tin of biscuit among the

at the table and drank bottled beer, and held up the fish to his blind eyes, and at intervals shouted out, "No, no; No, no," as we all crowded about the taboo line, watching and wondering.

The next day Billy Hindoo came back, but Professor No No repelled him with a stick, having counted the beer and the sardines and the biscuit, and found many missing. Then Billy Hindoo sought a place in the house of Tamua, and being a man of subtle mind, though without paper on which to write, carved the date of his rejection on a tree, together with the names of witnesses who had seen him struck. He would fain have brought suit against his master before the ancients, but they were afraid of men-of-war, and thought it ill to interfere. But the anger of Billy Hindoo surpassed that of a woman whose man has cast her off; and, baffled in one direction, he redoubled his efforts in another, telling tales about Professor No No that made the strongest shudder to hear them; how, indeed, he was Antichrist, and that his coming to Uvea had been foretold in Revelation. Whether this was true or false, it was evident that Professor No No believed not in God; for it was seen he went never to church, and remembered (when strangers asked him if he were a missionary) that he would grow beside himself and roar, "No, no!" snorting like a suffocating person.

Now there lived in the village a chief named Malamalama, a young man who owned a fine house and much land, and was withal so handsome and gay that there was scarce a woman but whose eyes shone at the sight of him. And Malamalama's wife was named Salesa, and the strange thing about Salesa was that she was white. Her father had been a papalangi, and her mother (who came from another island to the southward) a half white; and Salesa, the child of the two, was fairer than either, and a girl, besides, of remarkable beauty. It was this that found her favour in Malamalama's sight, for she was without family, and what Kanaka blood she possessed was that of slaves; but the chief must needs have his way, being

a man of imperious temper and wilful under advice; and so the little out-islander was married to him and elevated to the rank of chieftainess.

Then her arrogance and pride, previously concealed by the humbleness of her station, broke out with the fierceness of consuming flames.
Were you to pass her on the road and say, "Talofa, Salesa," she often
deigned not to return your greeting; and when people came to her house
she did not like, she would say to them, "Go away," like that, so that
everyone was insulted and retired with darkened faces. Of course, she was
not utterly without friends, women of contemptible spirit who fawned on
her like dogs, saying, "Lo, is she not beautiful?" But they were only a
handful, and by degrees grew less and less, for she was as mean with her
property as Professor No No, and made the most trifling returns for pigs or
costly presents. So in time she was left alone in her fine house, and though
she had a sewing-machine and a musical box, and gold-fish in a glass jar,
and an umbrella with a glittering handle, she spent her days in yawning and
her nights in telling Malamalama what a fool she had been to marry him.

After the manner of men, Malamalama's love increased in the proportion of her disdain, and there was nothing he would not do to try and please her. He took her on board every succeeding ship, and remained for hours in the trade-room while she spent the price of many tons of coprah and pearl-shell in filling a chest with purchases, saying, in her presumptuous way, "Give me twenty fathoms of this; give me forty fathoms of the other. This silk is good, lo! I will take a bolt." And Malamalama, who perhaps wanted an anchor for his boat, or a little, tiny, trifling pea-soupo of paint, had perforce to do without either and paddle ashore again, poorer, indeed, than many of his serfs and dependents.

On these occasions also Salesa showed a lawless deportment among the whites that jeopardised her good name and caused many to wonder and gossip. She would sit at the cabin table and drink beer and eat sardines, saying saucily, "Me white mans too," as she joked and laughed with the captains and supercargoes. Or, if someone put his head down the hatchway, she would call out, "Oh, the Kanaka dog! Go 'way, you peeping Kanaka dog!" Whereat the whites would slap her on the back, and it was said they even placed her on their knees and kissed her. Be that true or false, Malamalama grew to hate the sight of a ship; and sometimes when he and Salesa went on board together he showed her a sharp knife and said, "Be careful, you wicked white woman, or I shall kill you."

She was as changeable as a little child, and had humours, too, of tenderness and contrition, when she would put her arms round her husband's neck and be-dailing him, saying, "I love you! I love you!" and bemoan her contrariness and the fact that she was white. For though she was born and bred with us, she felt she was not of our race; and sometimes she would say to Malamalama when he reproached her, "Sell me to one of the captains for a whale-boat and let me go." But Malamalama only loved her the more, and his handsome face grew sullen and angry as he threatened again to kill her if she misbehaved.

Now, when Professor No No came to live with us on the lagoon, Salesa was beside herself with curiosity, and heaped presents on Billy Hindoo in order to learn about his master. But Billy Hindoo knew nothing but his own stutter, and though he took the presents and came constantly to Salesa's house, very little in the way of information was accomplished. At last, greatly daring, Salesa arrayed herself in her finest clothes, and with servants carrying gifts of pigs and chickens, went down to the lagoon to pay a visit to the stranger. She found Professor No No sitting at his table, looking at dead fish through bits of glass, and he never looked round as the party halted at the taboo line and coughed deprecatorily in order to attract his attention. Then Salesa, who feared neither devil nor man, took the baskets in her arms and stepped across the taboo, saying in a voice of sweetness, "Professor No No! Professor No No!"

He sprang from the table and rushed at her, waving his arms, and screaming as was his wont, "No, no! No, no!" while she, overcome with terror, dropped the gifts and fled like a sea-mew on the wings of the wind. That night all Uvea joked about her discomfiture while she sat in her house and cried, and Billy Hindoo was invited everywhere to tell the story in the antics that served him in the place of a tongue. But once Salesa had set her heart on a thing she never faltered nor turned aside; and though she waited and waited, it was not as one conquered or resigned. When the quarrel came between Billy Hindoo and his master, she saw the means, in Professor No No's desolation and abandonment, of obtaining the satisfaction of her purpose. For the white man, thus left to himself, grew increasingly dirty and uncared for; and his camp, once so clean under the care of Billy Hindoo, became as a pig-sty of empty cans and bottles. Nothing therein was washed, and the savour of Professor No No and his camp blew noisomely across the taboo line as one walked to leeward.

One day, after spying out that he had already sailed out for more fish to look at through bits of glass, Salesa crept into the settlement and began to make it clean again. She carried away all the tins and bottles; she swept the disordered grass; she entered the Professor's tent, filling his water-bottles, making his bed and decorating it with flowers and *laumaile*. Then, as she had so often watched Billy Hindoo from a distance, she spread the table with a clean cloth, and on it she placed a bottle of beer and a tin of sardines under a wire netting and three ship's biscuits in a row. Then she went back and hid in the undergrowth, waiting and waiting, like a warrior in an ambush.

But Professor No No made no sign as he landed from his boat, nor did he seem to perceive that anything unusual had taken place in the time he had been gone. He drank the bottle of beer and ate the sardines and biscuit, never troubling himself whence they had come; and while Salesa waited and waited with a suffocating heart, he looked at dead fish through bits of glass. But day by day she returned to his camp with the assiduity of a mother to her nursing child; and by degrees, growing bolder with custom, she no longer watched until Professor No No had departed, but moved here and there about his land, secure by reason of his blindness and preoccupation. Like a wild animal to whom one approaches with gentleness and precaution, thus it was with Professor No No in the hands of Salesa.

First he saw her only at a distance as she cleaned and swept; then a little closer as she spread his table and laid out his bottle of beer and the sardines and biscuit; then it came about that she even touched him with impunity and sat beside him in a chair as he continued to look at dead fish through bits of glass. At last she dared to speak, telling him softly the names of the dead fish, which he wrote down in a little book, and informing him also that her name was Salesa, and that she loved him.

And she, so defiant and proud, became as another person; so that she was kind, not only to Professor No No, but to others whom she had previously treated with contumely. She carried the white man's packages when he went abroad, his photograph-box and all manner of apparatus and tools, and the bottle of beer and the sardines for his well-being, never heeding the sun nor the fiery sand. She sat with him daily in his boat, baiting his hooks and catching fish likewise, and grew wise also in looking at them through bits of glass, so that he no longer ran at her and cried "No, no!" when she touched his things. On the contrary, her wisdom increased in such matters, becoming in time even as his own, so that she also took photographs, and hammered off pieces of coral from the reef, and grew excited over little common worthless fish that stung you if you touched them.

It is not to be supposed that Malamalama watched with any equanimity this increasing friendship between Professor No No and his wife, or that the constant tale of scandal and evil-doing fell on heedless ears. He beat Salesa repeatedly with a stick, and she bit him in return all over his beautiful body; and their fine house, once the envy of all Uvea, re-echoed distressfully with screams and blows. But the madness of a woman for a man is not thus to be set aside, and the more Malamalama beat her with a stick, the more ardent grew her love for Professor No No; and when he talked with her and argued, she would answer unabashed that whites were whites and Kanakas were Kanakas, and that it was ill to mix the oil and water of the races.

"But he is overgrown with hair like a dog," said Malamalama, "except on his head, which glistens like a sting-ray in the sun, and he is altogether hideous and frightening. It is not reasonable that anyone should prefer him to me."

"But there is that in his head which makes him beautiful," said Salesa. "Lo, I have things in my head also," said Malamalama, "and I pass my life besides like a man, diving for shell, and cutting copra on my property, and attending to the affairs of the church where I am deacon, and finding everywhere a better employment than that of looking at dead

fish through bits of glass."

"Malamalama," said Salesa, "divorce me and let me go, and take thy choice of all the maids of Uvea in my stead. Professor No No loves me not, but I am his bond-slave in love, and care for no other man but him."

Now, this was very good advice, and the chief would have done well to follow it. But there is in men a pride about their women that blinds their eyes to sense, and Malamalama, instead of heeding, grew, on the contrary, morose and wilful. He listened more greedily than ever to Billy Hindoo and to the tales the nigger brought him constantly of Salesa's misdoing; for Billy Hindoo was crazed with anger against his master and against the woman who had so successfully supplanted him, and was eager to revenge himself on both. And one day he brought, not only a new tale, but a bottle of gin he had managed to pilfer from the camp of Professor No No.

Malamalama began to drink the gin, and the more he drank the more he began to feel the aching of his spirit. He stopped the passers-by and told them of his wrongs; he rolled over in the road, so that he was all dirty, calling out curses on his wife and Professor No No. He cried and cried, and staggered about and shouted, and rushed hither and thither, exclaiming, "I will kill them! I will kill them!" And all the while he drank of the gin with an increasing fury, so that he went at last and got his rifle and four boxes of cartridges and walked unsteadily towards the lagoon, weeping and laughing and beating the air with his loaded gun. And I—then only a little child—followed him at a distance, wondering and mocking with the others.

Now, on this occasion it happened that Salesa was away in the boat, and Professor No No, all alone, was sitting at his table and looking at dead fish through bits of glass. Malamalama stopped at the taboo line, not daring to cross it, and withheld, besides, by the notice on the tree; and he was so tipsy with the gin that he could barely shout nor hold the gun up to his shoulder. But he fired, as straight as he could, in the direction of Professor No No, and shattered a glass barrel of dead fish at his elbow. Professor No No leaped in the air, so that at first we thought, erroneously, that he had been hurt; and he ran this way and that, dodging the bullets from Malamalama's gun. He seemed to believe that the taboo gave him protection, for, instead of bolting into the undergrowth, he raced around and around in a circle, and then inside this tent and that, so that it was laughable to watch him popping in and out like a terrified rat. And Malamalama, so overcome with gin that he could barely see, fired and fired and fired from the four boxes of his cartridges. Then when all was finished he rose and went home, while the children crowded the line and shouted, "Professor No No, art thou dead?"

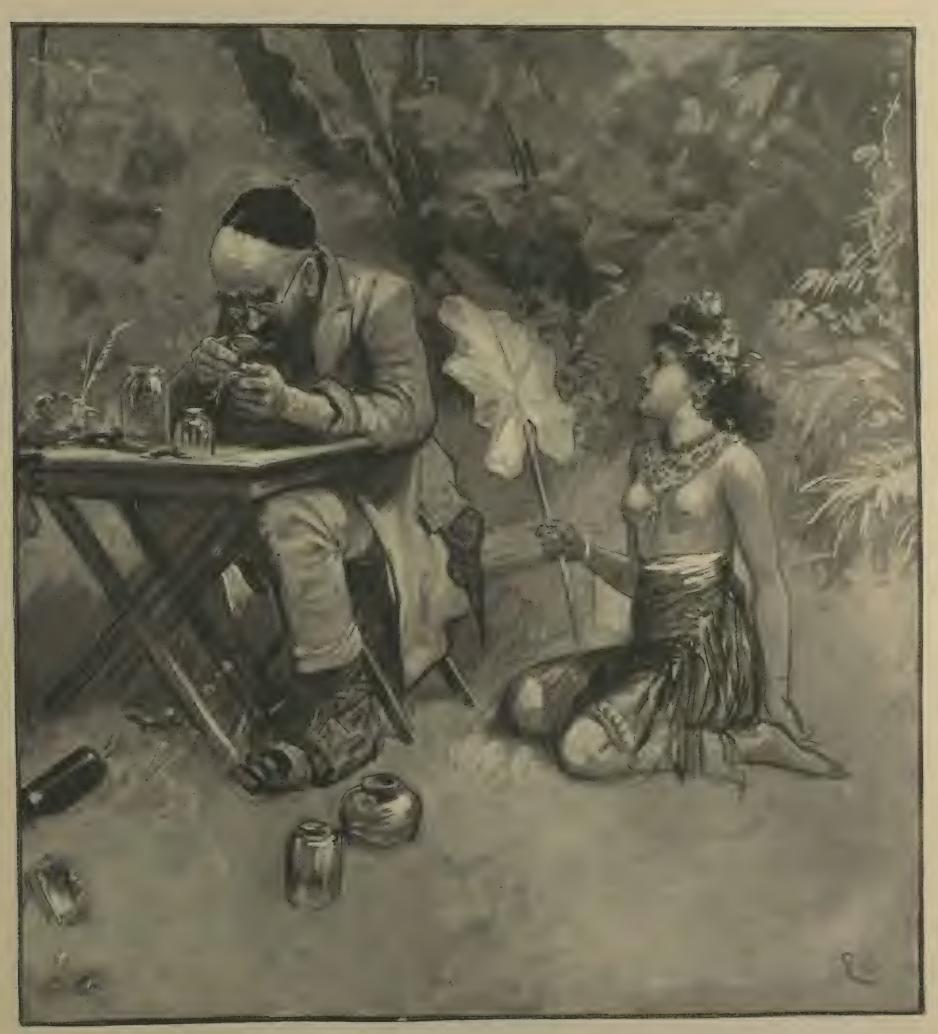
That night there was a meeting of the ancients in the speak-house, and all the culprits were there under guard to receive a judgment. Malamalama was fined one dollar for being drunk and fifteen dollars for firing unwarrantably at Professor No No; and Professor No No was fined fifteen dollars for having won Salesa from her husband; and Billy Hindoo was fined fifteen dollars for having given the gin to Malamalama and for the mischief he had caused with his lying tongue; and Salesa was surrendered to the matrons of the village to receive a lashing for her misconduct. Then Tanielu, the patr, prayed that God's wrath might be averted from so wicked a village, and made a beautiful parable about the Garden of Eden and the serpent.

One might have thought that this would have healed the matter, and that a punishment so nearly equal would have been submitted to with humility and grace. But, on the contrary, the quarrel went from bad to

worse, so that Tanielu, the pastor, would say sorrowfully from the pulpit that Uvea was like another hell, but with four devils instead of one. Malamalama, once a pillar of the church, was degraded from the rank of deacon and expelled, becoming speedily dissolute and abandoned, opening his house for forbidden dances, and taking new wives in shameless succession; and Salesa, her pretty body red with stripes, found no consolation whatever in her white darling, who ran at her repellingly, shouting "No, no!" like a lion; and Billy Hindoo, of whom everyone had tired on account of his light fingers and calumniating tongue, grew increasingly burdensome to his adopted

him, he fighting and resisting with all his might, crying "No, no!" in a terrible voice. Were he to unmoor his boat, lo! she was there swimming in its wake and demanding to be taken in, lest she drown; were he to sit down and quietly look at dead fish through bits of glass, lo! there also was she beside him in a chair; were he to slumber in a shady place during the afternoon, he would awake with his head in her lap or with her kisses against his lips.

So weak, indeed, was his heart, that he was not even grateful for her assistance against Billy Hindoo, who came constantly, this day and that,



Thus it was with Professor No No in the hands of Salesa.

family, and spent most of his time in stoning Professor No No from a safe distance and demanding his wages even to that day, together with a passage at once to the white country.

During this season no ship at all came to Uvea, though Professor No No watched unceasingly for one, and likewise Billy Hindoo, and likewise Malamalama, the chief; and Tanielu prayed and prayed and prayed without end, "Lord, send Thou speedily a vessel and rid us of these intruders." The white man, for all his wisdom, was cowardly beyond belief, and so fearful of Malamalama that the sight of Salesa made him tremble forthwith with apprehension. And she, repelled by her husband and dependent on the bounty of those that despised her, became as one lost to all propriety, and would run at Professor No No and clasp him in her arms and cherish

with unfailing regularity, to throw stones at his former master and cry threateningly, "Hi, yi, give me wages even to this day, and return me to the white country according to thy covenant." Then it was that Salesa would throw stones back again, or would hide in the bushes and try to strike the nigger with a knife, saying in mockery as she sprang at him, "Hi, yi! take that!" And once she came to him so close that she slashed him across the breast, and he hastened bleeding before the ancients and vociferously complained. Then she was whipped again by the matrons, and Billy Hindoo was fined for throwing stones, and Professor No No was fined yet a second time for stealing away Malamalama's wife, and Malamalama was fined for leading a life of infamy and riot, and Tanielu said again from the pulpit, "Hasten, Lord, or Thy servants perish."

Thus the days passed in unending strife and bitterness, terrible now to be recalled. When Malamalama took a new wife, the former wife's family would lie in wait and try to kill him; and other husbands, before exemplary and well conducted, growing restive to see him so successful in his unbridled wickedness, took in their turn the pick of the village maids, propagating hatred and disorder the like of which had never before been known in Uvea. Then the drought came, and the young nuts shrivelled on the trees, and the sky, as far as one's eye could reach, remained like shining copper, without a breath. It was plainly seen that God, in anger, was laying His hand heavily on Uvea; and lo! He spoke through the pastor Tanielu, saying, "Repent, repent, or else ye perish."

There was a great meeting of the ancients in the speak-house; and one

ancient spoke for Malamalama and another ancient spoke for Salesa, and another ancient spoke for Professor No No. and still another ancient spoke for Billy Hindoo; and the whole matter was inquired into from the first day and debated in turn by all the ancients, and a final judgment at length arrived at. Malamalama was confirmed in his latest marriage, swearing with his hand on the Bible that in future he would cease his evil and cling to her, giving a fine mat by way of reparation to each of her predecessors; and Salesa was declared divorced from Malamalama, and she and Professor No No were ordered to marry themselves forthwith before the pastor Tanielu; and Billy Hindoo was commanded to go back to his master and remain within the taboo line under pain of death, and an ancient was appointed to visit him daily to lash him if he misbehaved even in the smallest matter; and then the whole meeting prayed first for rain and then that God might send a ship.

When the new arrangement was with difficulty explained to the white

man, he was as one crazed, waving his arms and screaming out, "No, no!" without cessation; and he persisted thus, to the scandal of everyone, until Tanielu, losing patience, struck him like that on the head and married him immediately to Salesa, whose face shone with contentment and happiness. In this manner Professor No No and Salesa and Billy Hindoo were escorted homewards to their camp; and then everyone breathed with relief and congratulated one another on so peaceful and satisfactory a settlement.

But the ancients were still in their places when Salesa returned, saying that Professor No No had repulsed her; and behind her was Billy Hindoo, equally repulsed, who said his master refused to pay him his wages to that day or to send him back at once to the white country according to the covenant; and behind them both was Professor No No with his head tied in a towel, where the pastor had hurt him, cursing and reviling like a maniac.

Then the ancients held another meeting; and lo! it was a secret meeting; and Tanielu spoke for God, and everyone made speeches in turn;

and it was recalled, with eloquent outbursts, how peaceful and rainy and happy Uvea had been in the days preceding Professor No No's arrival. There were some who wanted to have him killed as a punishment; and others who voted against Salesa, saying it was she who was at fault; and still others who burned with resentment against Billy Hindoo, declaring that he was the worst of all. Thus, like a battle rolling to and fro, Salesa, Professor No No, and Billy Hindoo were each in turn imperilled; and when day broke their fate, though they knew it not, had been finally settled by the ancients.

Professor No No's boat was carried by twenty men from the lagoon shore, where it lay, over to the ocean beach; and with it was borne sardines and biscuit and beer from the white man's store; and the glass barrels

were emptied, many of them, of their dead fish. being washed and refilled with fresh water from the spring, and their glass tops fastened tightly with cocoanutsinnet. Then, when everything had been made ready, Billy Hindoo was forced to seat himself in the bow of the boat; and in the stern were put Salesa and Professor No No, side by side, the centre being filled with the cargo of provisions and water. And Salesa

laughed and joked with the men, begging them to take out Billy Hindoo, or to give him a boat of his own; and saying wildly, when denied, that she was going where none might whip her now, to find a beautiful island whereon to live with her husband. But the white man was convulsed with fear, and said nothing in the making ready of the boat, not even "No, no" when Salesa put her arms round him and kissed him again and again on the lips; and Billy Hindoo shook like a wet dog in the bow, whimpering, "Hi, yi! me British subject! me no likev



babbling deliriously besides of his wages even to that day, and of the rent covenant with its passage to the white country in a ship.

Then the sail was hoisted and the sheet put into Salesa's hand; and in this wise the boat was shoved into deep water, and her bow headed straight to seaward. Then Tanielu fell on his knees and prayed that Uvea might be delivered for ever and ever of such an infliction; and the young men formed a line with their rifles, ready to shoot if the voyagers showed the least sign of coming back; and across the waves one could see Salesa supporting Professor No No as the boat lay over in the wind, and her mocking laughter was borne back to us. And we waited and waited and waited as it became a diminishing speck against the sky; and waited and waited and waited until it disappeared. Then, lo! there were explosions of thunder and lightning, and the rain descended in torrents, and the little children all threw off their clothes and ran about rejoicing in the wet, while the elders looked at one another and said, "Lo, Uvea is delivered!"



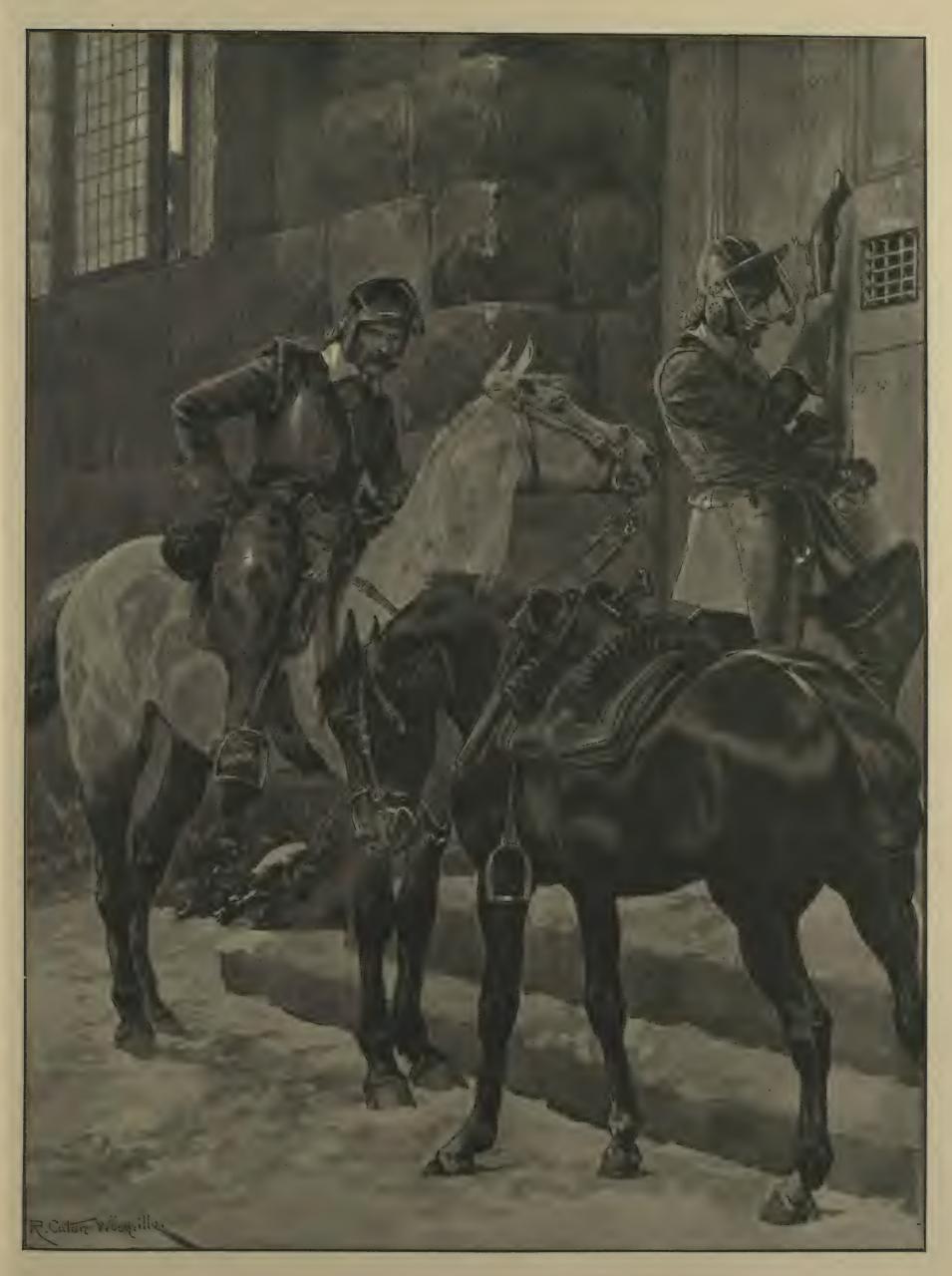
The boat lay over in the wind, and Salesa's mocking laughter was borne back to us.

"PROFESSOR NO NO."—BY LLOYD OSBOURNE.



ON THE WAY TO A CHRISTMAS GATHERING IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

Drawn by A. Forestier.



CHRISTMAS EVE DURING THE CIVIL WAR: AN UNWELCOME SUMMONS.

DRAWN BY R. CATON WOODVILLE.



A CHRISTMAS EAVESDROPPER: THE FAIRIES' YULETIDE FEAST.

DRAWN BY HERBERT GANDY.



LAST INSTRUCTIONS TO SANTA CLAUS: BEDTIME ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

DRAWN BY H. H. FLBRE.



A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE CHRISTMAS TREE: THE SPIDER'S WEB. DRAWN BY H. H. FLÈRE.

The ancient and honourable institution of the Christmas tree is now and then discarded in favour of the spider's web. From the ceiling is hung a large spider made of wire or other material, and to this are brought a number of reels or spindles, with different-coloured threads or ribbons attached.

These ribbons are threaded in a bewildering mase through the furniture and sometimes up and down stairs. At the far end of each clue is a present, and the child must follow the ribbon through all its devicus paths until the gift is arrived at and claimed.



IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES: THE FRIAR'S CHRISTMAS GOOSE IN DANGER.

Drawn by A. Forestier.



FEEDING THE FAIRIES: CHRISTMAS CHEER BEHIND THE SCENES.

DRAWN BY MAX COWPER.



HANGING UP THEIR DOLLIES' STOCKINGS.

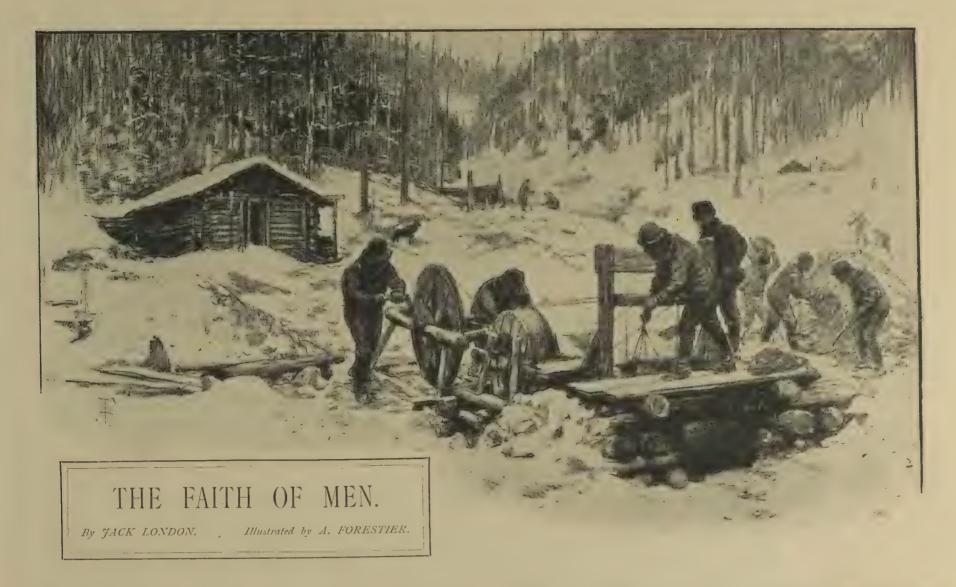
DRAWN BY MAX COWPER.



HER FIRST SNOW.
DRAWN BY PERCY F. S. SPENCE.



CHRISTMAS REVEILLE,
DRAWN BY R. CATON WOODVILLE.



"TELL you what we'll do; we'll shake for it."

That suits me," said the second man, turning, as he spoke, to the Indian who was mending snow-shoes in a corner of the cabin. "Here, you, Billebedam; take a run down to Oleson's cabin like a good fellow, and tell him we want to borrow his dice-box."

This sudden request in the midst of a council on wages of men, wood, and grub surprised Billebedam. Besides, it was early in the day, and he had never known white men of the calibre of Pentfield and Hutchinson to dice and play till the day's work was done. But his face was impassive as a Yukon Indian's should be, as he pulled on his mittens and went out the door.

Though eight o'clock, it was still dark outside, and the cabin was lighted by a tallow candle thrust into an empty whisky-bottle. It stood on the pine-board table in the middle of a noble disarray of dirty tin dishes. Tallow from innumerable candles had dripped down the long neck of the bottle and hardened into a miniature glacier. The small room, which composed the entire cabin, was as badly littered as the table; while at one end, against the wall, were two bunks, one above the other, with the blankets turned down just as the two men had crawled out in the morning.

Lawrence Pentfield and Corry Hutchinson were millionaires, though they did not look it. There seemed nothing unusual about them, while they would have passed muster as fair specimens of lumbermen in any Michigan camp. But outside, in the darkness, where holes yawned in the ground, were many men engaged in windlassing muck and gravel and gold from the bottoms of the holes, where other men received fifteen dollars per day for scraping it from off the bed-rock. Each day thousands of dollars' worth of gold were scraped from bed-rock and windlassed to the surface, and it all belonged to Pentfield and Hutchinson, who took their rank among the richest kings of Bonanza.

Pentfield broke the silence which followed on Billebedam's departure by heaping the dirty plates higher on the table and drumming a tattoo on the cleared space with his knuckles. Hutchinson snuffed the smoky candle and reflectively rubbed the soot from the wick between thumb and fore-finger.

"By Jove, I wish we could both go out!" he abruptly exclaimed. "That would settle it all."

Pentfield looked at him darkly. "If it weren't for your cursed obstinacy it'd be settled anyway. All you have to do is to get up and get. I'll look after things, and next year I can go out."

- "Why should I go? I've no one waiting for me-"
- "Your people," Pentfield broke in roughly.
- "Like you have," Hutchinson went on. "A girl, I mean, and you

Pentfield shrugged his shoulders gloomily. "She can wait, I guess."

- "But she's been waiting two years now."
- "And another won't age her beyond recognition."
- "That'd be three years. Think of it, old man—three years in this end of the earth, this falling-off place for the damned!" Hutchinson threw up his arm in an almost articulate groan.

He was several years younger than his partner—not more than twenty-six, and there was a certain wistfulness in his face which comes into the faces of men when they yearn vainly for the things they have been long denied. This same wistfulness was in Pentfield's face, and the groan of it was articulate in the heave of his shoulders.

"I dreamed last night I was in the Zinkand," he said. "The music playing, glasses clinking, voices humming, women laughing, and I was ordering eggs—yes, Sir, eggs, fried and boiled and poached and scrambled, and in all sorts of ways, and downing them as fast as they arrived."

"I'd have ordered salads and green things," Hutchinson criticised hungrily, "with a big rare porterhouse, and young onions and radishes—the kind your teeth sink into with a crunch."

"I'd have followed the eggs with them, I guess, if I hadn't awakened," Pentfield replied.

He picked up a trail-scarred banjo from the floor and began to strum a few wandering notes. Hutchinson winced and breathed heavily.

"Quit it!" he burst out with sudden fury as the other struck into a gaily lilting swing. "It drives me mad! I can't stand it!"

Pentfield tossed the banjo into a bunk and quoted-

"Hear me babble what the weakest won't confess—
I am Memory and Torment—I am Town!
I am all that ever went with evening dress!"

The other man winced where he sat, and dropped his head forward on the table. Pentfield resumed the monotonous drumming with his knuckles. A loud snap from the door attracted his attention. The frost was creeping up the inside in a white sheet, and he began to hum—

"The flocks are folded, boughs are bare,
The salmon takes the sea;
And oh! my fair, would I somewhere
Might house my heart with thee!"

Silence fell and was not again broken till Billebedam arrived and threw the dice-box on the table. "Um much cold," he said. "Oleson um speak to me, um say um Yukon freeze last night."

"Hear that, old man!" Pentfield cried, slapping Hutchinson on the shoulder. "Whoever wins can be hitting the trail for God's country this time to-morrow morning!"

He picked up the box, briskly rattling the dice. "What'll it be?"

"Straight poker dice," Hutchinson answered. "Go on, and roll them out."

Pentfield swept the dishes from the table with a crash, and rolled out
the five dice. Both looked eagerly. The shake was without a pair and
five-spot high.

"A stiff!" Pentfield groaned.

In Hutchinson's eyes was a glad light of which he was unconscious.

After much deliberating Pentfield picked up all the five dice and put them in the box.

"I'd shake to the five if I were you," Hutchinson suggested.

"No you wouldn't, not when you see this," Pentfield replied, shaking out the dice.

Again they were without a pair, running this time in unbroken sequence from two to six.

"A second stiff!" he groaned. "No use your shaking, Corry. You can't lose."

The other man gathered up the dice without a word, rattled them, rolled them out on the table with a flourish, and saw that he had likewise shaken a six-high stiff.

"Tied you anyway; but I'll have to do better than that," he said, gathering in four of them and shaking to the six. "And here's what beats you." But they rolled out deuce, tray, four, and five-a stiff still, and no

better or no worse than Pentfield's throw.

Hutchinson sighed. "Couldn't happen once in a million times," he said. "Nor in a million lives," Pentfield added, catching up the dice and quickly throwing them out. Three fives appeared, and, after much delay, he was rewarded by a fourth five on the second shake. The glad unconscious light was in his eyes now, while Hutchinson seemed to have lost his

But three sixes turned up on his first shake. A great doubt rose in the other's eyes, and hope returned into his. He had one more shake. Another six and he would go over the ice to Salt Water and the States; no other six and he would remain in the Klondike to drag through a bleak winter on grub that sickened soul and body.

He rattled the dice in the box, made as though to cast them, hesitated, and continued to rattle them.

"Go on! Go on! Don't take all night about it!" Pentfield cried sharply, bending his nails on the table, so tight was the clutch with which he strove to control himself.

The dice rolled forth, an upturned six meeting their eyes. Both men sat staring at it. There was a long silence. Hutchinson shot a covert glance at his partner, who, still more covertly, caught it, and pursed up his lips in an attempt to advertise his unconcern.

Hutchinson laughed as he got up on his feet. It was a nervous, apprehensive laugh. It was a case where it was more awkward to win than lose. He walked over to his partner, who whirled upon him fiercely-

"Now you just shut up, Corry! I know all you're going to saythat you'd rather stay in and let me go, and all that; so don't say it. You've your own people in Detroit to see, and that's enough. Besides, you can do for me the very thing I expected to do if I went out."

"And that is-?"

Pentfield read the full question in his partner's eyes, and answered, "Yes, that very thing. You can bring her in to me. The only difference will be a Dawson wedding instead of a San Francisco one."

"But, man alive!" Corry Hutchinson objected, "how under the sun can I bring her in? We're not exactly brother and sister, seeing that I have not even met her; and it wouldn't be just the proper thing, you know, for us to travel together. Of course it would be all right-you and I know that—but think of the looks of it, man!"

Pentfield swore under his breath, consigning the looks of it to a less frigid region than Alaska.

"Now if you'll just listen and not get astride that high horse of yours so blamed quick," his partner went on, "you'll see that the only fair thing under the circumstances is for me to let you go out this year. Next year is only a year away, and then I can take my fling."

Pentfield shook his head, though visibly swayed by the temptation. "It won't do, Corry, old man. I appreciate your kindness and all that; but it won't do. I'd be ashamed every time I thought of you slaving away in here in my place."

A thought seemed suddenly to strike him. Burrowing into his bunk and disrupting it in his eagerness, he secured a writing-pad and a pencil, and, sitting down at the table, began to write with swiftness and certitude.

"Here!" he said, thrusting the scrawled letter into his partner's hand, "you just deliver that, and everything'll be all right."

Hutchinson ran his eye over it and laid it down. "How do you know

the brother will be willing to make that beastly trip in here?" he demanded. "Oh, he'll do it for me-and for his sister," Pentfield replied. "You see, he's a tenderfoot, and I wouldn't trust her with him alone. But with you

along, it will be an easy trip and a safe one. As soon as you get out you'll go to her and prepare her. Then you can take your run east to your own people; and in the spring she and her brother'll be ready to start with you. You'll like her, I know, right from the jump; and from that you'll know her as soon as you lay eyes on her."

So saying, he opened his watch and exposed a girl's photograph pasted on the inside of the case. Corry Hutchinson gazed at it with admiration welling up in his eyes.

"Mabel is her name," Pentfield went on. "And it's just as well you should know how to find the house. Soon as you strike 'Frisco,' take a cab and just say, 'Holmes' place, Myrdon Avenue.' I doubt if the Myrdon Avenue is necessary. The cabby'll know where Judge Holmes lives."

"And, say," Pentfield continued, after a pause, "it won't be a bad idea for you to get me a few little things which-a-er-

"A married man should have in his business," Hutchinson blurted out with a grin.

Pentfield grinned back. "Sure-napkins and tablecloths, and sheets and pillow-slips, and such things. And you might get a good set of china. You know it'll come hard for her to settle down to this sort of thing. You can freight them in by steamer around by Behring Sea. And, I say, what's the matter with a piano?"

Hutchinson seconded the idea heartily. His reluctance had vanished, and he was warming up to his mission. "By Jove, Lawrence," he said at the conclusion of the council, as they both rose to their feet, "I'll bring that girl of yours in in style! I'll do the cooking and take care of the dogs, and all that brother'll have to do will be to see to her comfort and do for her whatever I've forgotten. And I'll forget damn little, I can tell you!"

The next day Lawrence Pentfield shook hands with him for the last time, and watched him, running with his dogs, disappear up the frozen Yukon on his way to Salt Water and the world. Pentfield went back to his Bonanza mine, which was many times more dreary than before, and faced resolutely into the long winter. There was work to be done, men to superintend and operations to direct in burrowing after the erratic pay-streak; but his heart was not in the work. Nor was his heart in any work till the tiered logs of a new cabin began to rise on the hill behind the mine. It was a grand cabin, warmly built, and divided into three comfortable rooms. Each log was hand-hewed and squared-an expensive whim when the axe-men received a daily wage of fifteen dollars. But to him nothing could be too costly for the home in which Mabel Holmes was to live.

So he went about with the building of the cabin, singing, "And oh, my fair, would I somewhere might house my heart with thee!" Also, he had a calendar pinned on the wall above the table, and his first act each morning was to check off the day, and to count the days that were left ere his partner would come booming down the Yukon ice in the spring. Another whim of his was to permit no one to sleep in the new cabin on the hill. It must be as fresh for her occupancy as the square-hewed wood was fresh; and when it stood complete he put a padlock on the door. No one entered save himself, and he was wont to spend long hours there, and to come forth with his face strangely radiant, and in his eyes a glad warm light.

In December he received a letter from Corry Hutchinson. He had just seen Mabel Holmes. She was all she ought to be, to be Lawrence Pentfield's wife, he wrote. He was enthusiastic, and his letter sent the blood tingling through Pentfield's veins. Other letters followed, one on the heels of another, and sometimes two or three together when the mail lumped up. And they were all in the same tenor. Corry had just come from Myrdon Avenue; Corry was just going to Myrdon Avenue; or Corry was at Myrdon Avenue. And he lingered on and on in San Francisco, nor even mentioned his trip to Detroit.

Lawrence Pentfield began to think that his partner was a great deal in the company of Mabel Holmes for a fellow who was going east to see his people. He even caught himself worrying about it at times, though he would have worried more had he not known Mabel and Corry so well. Mabel's letters, on the other hand, had a great deal to say about Corry. Also, a threat of timidity, that was near to disinclination, ran through them concerning the trip in over the ice and the Dawson marriage. Pentfield wrote back heartily, laughing at her fears, which he took to be the more physical ones of danger and hardship, rather than those bred of maidenly reserve.

But the long winter and tedious wait, following upon the two previous long winters, were telling upon him. The superintendence of the men and the pursuit of the pay-streak could not break the irk of the daily round, and the end of January found him making occasional trips to Dawson, where he could forget his identity for a space at the gaming-tables. Because he could afford to lose, he won, and "Pentfield's luck" became a stock phrase among the faro-players.

His luck ran with him till the second week in February. How much farther it might have run is conjectural; for, after one big game, he never played again. It was in the Opera House that it occurred, and for an hour it had seemed that he could not place his money on a card without making the card a winner. In the lull at the end of a deal, while the game-keeper was shuffling the deck, Nick Inwood, the owner of the game, remarked, apropos of nothing-

"I say, Pentfield, I see that partner of yours has been cutting up monkeyshines on the Outside."

"Trust Corry to have a good time," Pentfield had answered, "especially when he has earned it."

"Every man to his taste," Nick Inwood laughed; "but I should scarcely call getting married a good time."

"Corry married!" Pentfield cried, incredulous and yet surprised out of himself for the moment.

"Sure," Inwood said. "I saw it in the 'Frisco paper that came in over the ice this morning.'

"Well; and who's the girl?" Pentfield demanded, somewhat with the air of patient fortitude with which one takes the bait of a catch, and is aware at the time of the large laugh bound to follow at his expense.

Nick Inwood pulled the newspaper from his pocket and began looking it over, saying, "I haven't a remarkable memory for names, but it seems to me it's something like Mabel-Mabel-oh, yes, here it is! 'Mabel Holmes, daughter of Judge Holmes,' whoever he is."

Lawrence Pentfield never turned a hair, though he wondered how any man in the north should know her name. He glanced coolly from face to face to note any vagrant signs of the game that was being played upon him, but beyond a healthy curiosity the faces betrayed nothing. Then he turned to the gambler and said, in cold, even tones-

"Inwood, I've got an even five hundred here that says the print of what you have just said is not in that paper."

The gambler looked at him in quizzical surprise. "Go 'way, child. I don't want your money."

"I thought so," Pentfield sneered, returning to the game and laying a couple of bets.

Nick Inwood's face flushed, and, as though doubting his senses, he ran careful eyes over the print of a quarter of a column. Then he turned on Lawrence Pentfield.

- "Look here, Pentfield," he said, in quick, nervous manner, "I can't allow that, you know."
 - "Allow what?" Pentfield demanded brutally.
 - "You inferred that I lied."
- "Nothing of the sort," came the reply. "I merely inferred that you were trying to be clumsily witty."
 - "Make your bets, gentlemen," the dealer protested.
 - "But I tell you it's true," Nick Inwood insisted.



Pentfield rolled out the five dice.
"THE FAITH OF MEN,"—BY JACK LONDON.

"And I have told you I've five hundred that says it's not in that paper," Pentfield answered, at the same time throwing a heavy sack of dust on the table.

"I am sorry to take your money," was the retort, as Inwood thrust the newspaper into Pentfield's hand; "but seeing is believing."

Pentfield saw, though he could not quite bring himself to believe. Glancing through the headline, "Young Lochinvar Came Out of the North," and skimming the article until the names of Mabel Holmes and Corry Hutchinson, coupled together, leaped squarely before his eyes, he turned to the top of the page. It was a San Francisco paper.

"The money's yours, Inwood," he remarked with a short laugh.

"There's no telling what that partner of mine will do when he gets started."

Then he returned to the article and read it word for word, very slowly and very carefully. He could no longer doubt. Beyond dispute Corry Hutchinson had married Mabel Holmes. "One of the Bonanza Kings," it described hire, "a partner with Lawrence Pentfield (whom San Francisco society has not yet forgotten), and interested with that gentleman in other rich Klondike properties." Further, and at the end, he read, "It is whispered that Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson will, after a brief trip east to Detroit, make their real honeymoon journey into the fascinating Klondike country."

"I'll be back again; keep my place for me," Pentfield said, rising to his feet and taking his sack, which meantime had hit the blower and come back lighter by five h u n d r e d dollars.

He went down the street and bought a Seattle paper. It contained the his work much as he had always done, when he read an account of the marriage in a Portland paper. Then he called in a friend to take charge of his mine and departed up the Yukon behind his dogs. He held to the Salt Water Trail till White River was reached, into which he turned. Five days later he came upon a hunting-camp of the White River Indians. In the evening there was a feast, and he sat in honour beside the chief; and next morning he headed his dogs back toward the Yukon. But he no longer travelled alone. A young squaw fed his dogs for him that night and helped to pitch camp. She had been mauled by a bear in her childhood and suffered from a slight limp. Her name was Lashka, and she was diffident at first with the strange white man who had come out of

the Unknown, married her with scarcely a look or word, and who was carrying her back with him into the Unknown.

But Lashka's was better fortune than falls to most Indian girls who mate with white men in the Northland. No sooner was Dawson reached than the barbaric marriage which had joined them was resolemnised, in the white man's fashion, before a priest. From Dawson, which to her was all a marvel and a dream, she was taken directly to the Bonanza claim and installed in the square - hewed cabin on the hill.

The nine days' wonder that followed, arose not so much out of the fact of the squaw whom Lawrence Pentfield had taken to bed and board, as out of the ceremony which had legalised the tie. The properly sanctioned marriage was the one thing that passed the community's comprehension. But no one bothered Pentfield about it. So long as a man's vagaries did no especial hurt to the community, the



Pentfield saw, though he could not quite bring himself to believe.

same facts, though somewhat condensed. Corry and Mabel were indubitably married. Pentfield returned to the Opera House and resumed his seat in the game. He asked to have the limit removed.

"Trying to get action?" Nick Inwood laughed, as he nodded consent to the dealer. "I was going down to the A.C. store, but now I guess I'll stay and watch you do your worst."

This Lawrence Pentfield did at the end of two hours' plunging, when the dealer bit the end off a fresh cigar and struck a match as he announced that the bank was broken. Pentfield cashed in for forty thousand, shook hands with Nick Inwood, and stated that it was the last time he would ever play at his game or at anybody else's.

No one knew or guessed that he had been hit, much less hit hard. There was no apparent change in his manner. For a week he went about

community let the man alone. Nor was Pentfield barred from the cabins of men who possessed white wives. The marriage ceremony removed him from the status of squaw-man, and placed him beyond moral reproach, though there were men who challenged his taste where women were concerned.

No more letters arrived from the Outside. Six sled-loads of mail had been lost at the Big Salmon. Besides, Pentfield knew that Corry and his bride must by that time have started in over the trail. They were even then on their honeymoon trip—the honeymoon trip he had dreamed of for himself through two dreary years. His lip curled with bitterness at the thought, but beyond being kinder to Lashka he gave no sign.

March had passed, and April was nearing its end, when, one spring morning, Lashka asked permission to go down the creek several miles to Siwash Pete's cabin. Pete's wife, a Stewart River woman, had sent up word

What Were Christmas Without an Apollo?

did they do in the olden times to make Christmas merry by way of music? Well, the village waits came round, and after discoursing such music as they knew appropriate to the time of the year, the band partook of the host's hospitality and backsheesh, and hied them to other houses, where they were similarly treated. Long after the Piano had been invented, the waits continued to be a popular institution in country districts, and they are even now by no means quite a thing of the past. But

WERE

the carols, the roundelays, and the jigs of the waits the only kind of music afforded us in these days we should have just reason to complain. The Piano has only reached within the last fifty years or so what may be considered its climax as a musical instrument. In almost every comfortable

is the time above all others when it is most frequently and most joyously heard. Then is it that relations and friends gather together and listen to the brightest members of the family play vocal and instrumental excerpts from the latest musical comedies. This is all very enjoyable and characteristic of British home life. But beyond making the Piano the vehicle for the lighter class of music, and using it as an accompanimental machine, there are thousands, ay, hundreds of thousands of people in this country who would make it the means of reproduction of the finest types of music written.

extraordinary digital and technical skill, which only the few can hope to obtain, and that only by laborious study commenced in youth, and continued without intermission until the title "pianist," as it is now understood, has been fairly earned, the music-lover must despair of attaining his ideals by his personal efforts alone. But what cannot be done with the aid of the

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50 Years Ago

was the time of the crinoline skirt and the "old-fashioned English Winter." At that time "Van Houten's Cocoa" had been in use for more than 30 years, and was known to be the finest of all cocoas; to-day it is the standard cocoa of the world, acknowledged alike by cocoa experts and consumers as THE BEST. It is an ideal winter beverage, no matter whether it is frosty, damp, or muggy; for it not only contains all the constituents necessary for building up the body and furnishing strength and energy, but is as delicious as it is healthful. You cannot beat the "best," and the best beverage for regular family use is

"Van Houten's Cocoa."

that something was wrong with her baby; and Lashka, who was pre-eminently a mother-woman and who held herself to be truly wise in the matter of infantile troubles, missed no opportunity of nursing the children of other women as yet more fortunate than she.

Pentfield harnessed his dogs, and, with Lashka behind, took the trail down the creek-bed of Bonanza. Spring was in the air. The sharpness had gone out of the bite of the frost, and, though snow still covered the land, the murmur and trickling of water advertised that the iron grip of winter was relaxing. The bottom was dropping out of the trail, and here and there new trail had been broken around open holes. At such a place, where there was not room for two sleds to pass, Pentfield heard the jingle of approaching bells, and stopped his dogs.

A team of tired - looking dogs appeared around the narrow bend, followed by a heavily laden sled. At the gee-pole was a man who steered in a manner familiar to Pentfield, and behind the sled walked two women. He returned to the man at the gee-pole. It was Corry. Pentfield got on his feet and waited. He was glad that Lashka was with him. The meeting could not have come about better had it been planned, he thought. And as he waited he wondered what they would say, what they would be able to with a certain calm elation of spirit that seemed somewhat to compensate for the wrong which had been done him.

"She is my squaw," he said. "Mrs. Pentfield, if you please."

Corry Hutchinson gasped, and Pentfield left him to return to the two women. Mabel, with a worried expression on her face, seemed holding herself aloof. He turned to Dora and asked, quite genially, as though all the world were sunshine-

"How did you stand the trip, anyway? Have any trouble to sleep warm?" "And how did Mrs. Hutchinson stand it?" he asked next, his eyes on Mabel.

"Oh, you dear ninny!" Dora cried, throwing her arms around him and hugging him. "Then you saw it, too! I thought something was the matter, you were acting so strangely."

"I . . . I hardly understand," he stammered.

"It was corrected in next day's paper," Dora chattered on. "We did not dream you would see it. All the other papers had it correctly, and of course that one miserable paper was the very one you saw!"

"Wait a moment. What do you mean?" Pentfield demanded, a sudden fear at his heart, for he felt himself on the verge of a great gulf.

But Dora swept volubly on. "Why, when it became known that Mabel



"That is Mrs. Pentfield sitting on the sled over there."

say. As for himself, there was no need to say anything. The explaining was all on their side, and he was ready to listen to them.

As they drew in abreast Corry recognised him, and halted the dogs. With a "Hello, old man!" he held out his hand.

Pentfield shook it, but without warmth or speech. By this time the two women had come up, and he noticed that the second one was Dora Holmes. He doffed his fur cap, the flaps of which were flying, shook hands with her, and turned toward Mabel. She swayed forward, splendid and radiant, but faltered before his outstretched hand. He had intended to say, "How do you do, Mrs. Hutchinson?" and shake hands with her in just the fashion a man should with another man's wife; but, somehow, the "Mrs. Hutchinson" had choked him, and all he had managed to articulate was the "How do you do?"

There was all the constraint and awkwardness in the situation he could have wished. Mabel betrayed the agitation appropriate to her position, while Dora, evidently brought along as some sort of peacemaker, was saying, "Why, what is the matter, Lawrence?"

Before he could answer Corry plucked him by the sleeve and drew him aside. "See here, old man, what's this mean?" Corry demanded in a low tone, indicating Lashka with his eyes.

"I can hardly see, Corry, where you can have any concern in the matter,"

Pentfield answered mockingly.

But Corry drove straight to the point. "What is that squaw doing on your sled? A nasty job you've given me to explain all this away. I only hope it can be explained away. Who is she? Whose squaw is she?"

Then Lawrence Pentfield delivered his stroke, and he delivered it

and I were going to Klondike, Every Other Week said that when we were gone it would be lovely on Myrdon Avenue, meaning, of course, 'lonely.'

"Then . . . ?" "I am Mrs. Hutchinson," Dora answered. "And you thought it was Mabel all the time.'

"Precisely the way of it," Pentfield replied slowly. "But I can see now. The reporter got the names mixed. The Seattle and Portland papers copied.'

He stood silently for a minute. Mabel's face was turned toward him again, and he could see the glow of expectancy in it. Corry was immersed in the ragged toe of one of his moccasins, while Dora was stealing sidelong glances at the immobile face of Lashka sitting on the sled. Lawrence Pentfield stared straight out before him into a dreary future, through the grey vistas of which he saw himself riding on a sled behind running dogs with lame Lashka by his side.

Then he spoke, quite simply, looking Mabel in the eyes. "I am very sorry. I did not dream it. I thought you had married Corry. That is Mrs. Pentfield sitting on the sled over there."

Mabel Holmes turned weakly toward her sister, as though all the fatigue of her great journey had suddenly descended on her. Dora caught her around the waist. Corry Hutchinson was still occupied with his moccasin. Pentfield glanced quickly from face to face, then turned to his sled.

"Can't stop here all day, with Pete's baby waiting," he said to Lashka.

The long whip-lash hissed out, the dogs sprang against the breast-bands, and the sled lurched and jerked ahead.

"Oh, I say, Corry," Pentfield called back. "You'd better occupy the old cabin. It's not been used for some time. I've built a new one on the hill."

THE END.



"I WANT you to understand distinctly," she said, "that I marry you on account of the diamonds."

- "As long as you marry me, I don't care," he answered, laughing.
- "Don't laugh. Be as serious as I am. I have no wish to marry you. I do not love you——"
- "You will love me in time. A girl ought not to love when she marries. Especially not at eighteen."
- "I did not say that I do not love." She faltered and blushed. "I said that I do not love you. As a matter of fact——"
- "You are talking nonsense, Mabel. I have asked you to marry me, and you have consented."
 - "You are resolved then that this thing shall take place?"
 - "Absolutely resolved."
- "Be it so. And I am resolved there shall be no misunderstanding. I marry you because my mother compels me to, and she compels me to because she has set her mind on my going to Court in the Rockingham diamonds."
 - "It is rather late in the day to come with this story-"
- "Quite true. I should have spoken sooner; I have been looking for the courage to do so. But last Tuesday, when you proposed to me, my mother frightened me into saying 'Yes.'"
- "Oh, come, who has been the hunter, pray, during the last week, and who has been the quarry?"
- "How prettily you put it!" she flashed out at him. "I was both. I admit, Lord Rockingham, that my mother wants this marriage. She has always wanted it. Wanted? She will have it. And I don't believe there's a power in the world could resist my mother's will."

Her voice grew wretched over the final sentence. He showed his strong yellow teeth. "Fortunately, her will and mine coincide," he said.

- "It is a sort of life-long rivalry between her and my aunt," she continued helplessly. "Both of them are rich enough, Heaven knows; it isn't a question of money. But your diamonds are the finest in our part of the world, and my aunt has vowed that Cicely shall wear them."
- "And now you shall. What a joke! I can quite understand your mother," he said.
 - "And under these conditions, knowing all this, you consent to marry me?"
- "If we lived in feudal times, and your father shut you up in his castle, and you hurled abuse at me from the ramparts, I should besiege you, and burn the castle, and carry you off prisoner to the nearest chapel. Will that suffice?"

She gazed at him open-eyed, as a rabbit at a serpent, a lamb at a wolf. "So madly do I love you," he added in tones thick with passion.

- "Love!" she said, and all the pure woman within her found voice in the word.
- "Your mother is right," he persisted. "The Rockingham diamonds deserve the finest neck in the county."

Her cheeks mantled over. She felt that the adjective would have applied to a horse.

- "My mother is always right," she said bitterly. She remembered the single occasion on which, as a child, she had contradicted a maternal opinion and been beaten into assent.
- "I cannot say so much of mine," he replied. "Honestly, I must confess that she has set her mind on my marrying my cousin Edith Sinclair. But all my life she has wished me to do one thing, and I have wisely done the other."

She looked at him for the first time with admiration in her pale-blue eyes.

- "I am going off now to communicate to her the great news of our engagement."
 - "Perhaps she will refuse her consent!"
 - "Probably. In that case we will manage without."
- "One mother's blessing," she said, a little wildly, "and the other mother's curse!"
 - "Ça se vaut."
- "Two curses," she exclaimed; and springing from her seat hastened towards the door.

He ran forward. "After all," he said, "what would you have me do?" "Release me from this engagement."

"Give you back the word you have just given me? Tell your mother you won't have me."

She faltered, "I cannot."

"Then you expect me to go and tell her that I won't have you. I have changed my mind all of a sudden since you have consented. You expect me to make a hopeless cad of myself, in ruining my own happiness. You must see that this is madness, Mabel. Dearest, you will love me. My love will teach you how."

She waited a moment. Her chest heaved: she strove to steady it. "Since it must be so," she gasped, "let me say what I had hoped never to utter. I love another man. My cousin, Harry Stretton. He is just back from South Africa, where he has made a fortune. I have written him a letter—to London—telling all."

"What do you mean by all?"

"That I love him and am going to marry you for your diamonds."

"And so, by G—, you shall!" The thought of an actual, existing rival seemed to deprive the passionate suitor of his last prestige of never superabundant self-control. His eyes were bloodshot: he clenched his fist.

"Either you shall refuse me yourself or—I will never give you up." He strode past her and out of the room. It had been arranged that the fiancée and her parents were to follow him that same evening to Burton Lees—his place in the same county, some thirty miles off. Thither he departed before, to prepare his lady mother.

Immediately on his arrival he solicited an interview, and awaited the approaching conflict, standing expectant, with the arched neck and dilated nostrils of the war-horse. For, although he might speak lightly of his lifelong struggle for supremacy with his mother, he remained perfectly well aware that his loud obstinacy and arrogance were adequately confronted by the lady's calm persistence and intrigue. Often, when he had borne down all before him, she had cut away the ground, unnoticed, beneath his conquering feet.

Lady Rockingham reclined in a great Louis XVI. bergère by the brightly burning log-fire. She was a small, delicate-featured woman, white and pink, and she lay, more than she sat, against the carved gilt sides and flowered cushions of the enormous arm-chair.

"Back at last?" she said in a little voice like a flute. "I hope you enjoyed yourself at Stonely?"

"Very much, thank you. Mother, I have asked Mabel Prescott to marry me."

She started. He saw the jerk of her little body against the firelight. She did not ask for any further information: it would never have occurred to her as thinkable, that any girl could reject her son.

"Congratulate me!" he suggested after a time, for her silences, as both knew, were an effective form of speech.

"You were not born a fool," she answered slowly. "By no means But it all comes to the same in the end—with women."

"You think me a fool for marrying Miss Prescott?"

- "I think you a fool for not marrying Edith Sinclair."
- "For not doing as you wish?"
- "For not understanding why I wish it. The wife you need should be a strong woman, able to hold her own, an intellectual equal, a companion. You will be wretched with a doll."
 - "All the same, I must marry the woman I love."
- "That is just what a man like you must not do. You must marry the woman you admire and appreciate, and make love to the rest."
 - "Well, there's something in that," he admitted.
- "I know very little of Mabel Prescott. I should say she was a lovely bit of muslin and lace. You can't want to live all your life with that."
- "I have proposed to her and she has accepted me. She is coming here, with her parents, to dinner. There is no more to be said."

Lady Rockingham was out of her chair on the hearth-rug, small, but erect. "This, then is the outcome of your week's shooting at Stonely!



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You have been tracked by that Prescott woman and caught. I should have understood that and come down here sooner, and kept house for you!"

"What is the use of these reflections?"

She screamed in her nervousness.

"You should have married Edith Sinclair. Not only because she would have made you a good wife, but because it was your duty. You know perfectly well that in the law-suit between her father and yours the law decided for us, but right was on his side. You had one chance of making amends, and you have kicked it from you. Poor girl! She must see a Miss Prescott in her place."

"The law was on our side," he said sullenly.

"The woman Prescott is a brute who beats her children. I do not think she would succeed in beating you. I cannot understand why she should be so anxious to marry this girl already! She is only a child, and you are thirtythree." Lady Rockingham spoke desperately, flinging her thoughts right and left, as a bird beats against a cage, for escape

"The girl is pretty and would be sure to find a husband," she continued. "But you, you must marry Edith Sinclair. I tell you our honour demands it. You promised your father, on his deathbed. Practically, you promised

him, Rockingham."

"I said 'Yes' to quiet him. He didn't know what he was talking about. Concessions of that kind can't dispose of a man's whole life for him."

they had been in the future's assets. The unpardonable crime in her eyes was this confession by the girl to a man whom a princess would have been glad to call her own. Lady Rockingham's proud heart burned red at the thought. She felt that she hated Mabel.

On the stairs, while her guests were already in the hall, she had waylaid

"Your promise to your father! Your promise to your father!" she said.

"I am going to marry Mabel Prescott."

"Edith--Algernon-your duty-her claims-

"I intend to marry Mabel Prescott."

She set her teeth hard behind his back. And she smiled with cool reserve to Lady Prescott in the drawing-room. Sir George was bucolic and good-natured: he approved of you as long as you were not a poacher, unless you disagreed with his wife.

They dined early and rapidly; it was barely half-past eight when they rose from table. A cloud hung over the little party in spite of Sir George's loud laughter and Lady Prescott's pompous contentment. Mabel sat almost

silent, her eyes occasionally brimming with tears.

"Yes, my dear Lady Prescott," said Lady Rockingham vaguely. They were standing together by the great fireplace in the hall. The guest had said several things. The lady of the house answered, not listening.



"It is murder," he wailed, "to fetch a sick man out of his bed on such a night as this."

"The title may be yours, but the property and the diamonds are hers."

"And, unfortunately, I am dependent on the diamonds for my chance of marrying Mabel Prescott."

"That is nonsense. Any woman would marry you for yourself. But I am in no mood for joking.'

"I don't joke. Miss Prescott has frankly informed me that she marries me for the sake of the diamonds."

"Are you out of your senses?"

"In my senses and in earnest. The famous Rockingham diamonds are

She put her little white jewelled hand to her forehead. "It is I, then, who am going out of my mind. She confessed this to you, and you acquiesced?" "I must in honesty admit that the prize is of her mother's seeking.

She did not seem particularly anxious to try matrimony. But that will come." He spoke with wise assurance and threw out his chest. "And you men call this love," she said, with an old woman's helpless

conviction. She sunk back into her chair and her eyes were fixed on

An hour later she welcomed Sir George and Lady Prescott and their daughter with the tact of a woman who wishes to create no very definite impression of approval or regret. She had been thinking matters over and could make allowances for Mabel's mother. In her day, nearly forty years ago, she had certainly not married on account of the diamonds, for she had really liked her husband. Still, she remembered what an agreeable item Suddenly, however, the latter turned, facing her companion. "True," she said; "I remember the occasion perfectly. Yes, I wore the family diamonds. They were very beautiful, as you say."

"Were and are," replied Lady Prescott smiling.

The other woman moved a few steps away in the fierceness of her struggle. Then she came close and spoke distinctly. "There is something I ought to tell you-you and your daughter. The diamonds are false!"

"False?" Lady Prescott cried the word aloud. But Lady Rockingham had seen Mabel raise her eyes with a new light in them.

"Yes, false! Twenty years ago, at the time of the law-suit-you need not ask me why or how, I should not answer you-they were sold, and imitation ones substituted."

When Lady Prescott spoke at last, it was to say, with great determination,

"No one need know." "I am not so sure of that," replied Lady Rockingham. The two women looked into each other's eyes and understood each other perfectly. Lady Prescott read: "I am opposed to this marriage. I am ready to tell the whole world about the diamonds." She realised at once the absurdity of her position.

"What does it matter-genuine or false?" said Lady Rockingham sweetly, "as long as the love is true. Dear Mabel does not marry my Algernon on

account of the diamonds."

The words sounded like an echo. Lady Prescott at once turned on her daughter. "You have told them, like the idiot you are," she said.

The two gentlemen came strolling in from the dining-room.

"Lord Rockingham," cried Lady Prescott, trembling with passion, "your mother has just informed us that the famous family jewels are paste."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Sir George.

The Dowager looked at her son's face and into that of Lady Prescott.

"And Lady Prescott," she said calmly, "has just informed me that the diamonds were the inducement for the marriage."

"I said no such thing!" exclaimed Lady Prescott.

"Madam, how can you deny it?"

The Dowager was triumphant, for surely by this public exposure she had gained the day. But a very ugly expression had come into Rockingham's face. He leered across at his mother, watching her. Lady

commanded attention. His yellow face had gone grey. He was looking at the girl he intended to make his wife.

Mabel had not spoken, shrinking away into the shade.

He took out his watch. "The matter must be cleared up at once," he said. "We cannot allow it to remain uncertain for even a few hours. I cannot endure that. There is some complication. I fancy my mother is mistaken, misinformed."

The Dowager's heart gave a great jump. "You don't believe me? You doubt my word?" she exclaimed. She had not reckoned on this. She had expected the inevitable exposure of Lady Prescott's aspirations to end the whole business at once. It had been made evident to the blindest that the diamonds were the chief attraction. And her arrogant son, after having been openly told as much, could consent to go on!



"The stones are genuine enough!"

Prescott, always a violent and unreasonable woman, caught the scowl in his eye and misinterpreted it.

"It is not the value of the jewellery," she said hotly, "but the scandal of the thing, the exposure. I cannot allow my daughter's name to be mixed up in so discreditable a business!"

"You are angry, and use strong words," began Rockingham, outwardly collected, but his mother interrupted him, stirring the flames.

"You speak," she said, "as if we had lured you into this engagement by the bait of the jewels. You should have explained beforehand that the jewels, and not my son, were the prize!"

Sir George threw up his hands. Never before had he been present at a conversation of this kind between ladies, and yet he had learnt, by experience, to what lengths an eager woman will go.

"Hush!" said Lord Rockingham. He said it in a tone which

Lady Prescott, who had been on the point of demanding her carriage, pricked up her ears.

"I think there is a mistake," persisted Rockingham, "you must have misunderstood my father. Lady Prescott, you will oblige me by not leaving this house till the matter is cleared up. I shall telegraph immediately to Barnett—he has been our jeweller for more than half a century."

"Barnett knows nothing about it," interrupted the Dowager in very shaky tones.

"He shall know. If he catches the 9.30 express he can be here a little over eleven. You will oblige me, Sir George, by delaying your departure till then." Already he was scribbling a telegram.

The Dowager made a supreme effort. "Your behaviour is outrageous! You insult me!" she cried.

"By no means. You entirely misunderstand," he answered. "I tell



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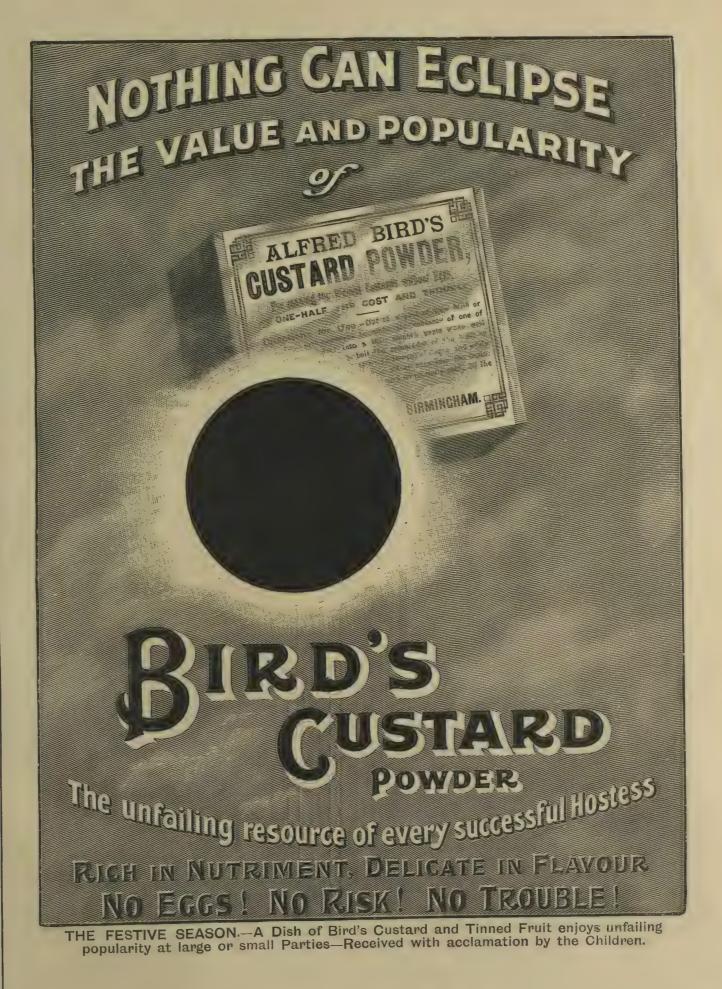
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you it is all a mistake-a mistake." He threw the word to her as the broadest of hints, an appeal to retrieve her position by retreat.

"I am sure it is all a mistake," echoed Sir George. "Meanwhile, if we are to wait here till past eleven what do you say to a game of bridge"?

"Bridge, by all means," answered Rockingham.

The girl lay, almost motionless, in her arm-chair. The game dragged on through the silence. Sir George played with zest.

"The man will not come," reflected the Dowager, "the chances are a hundred to one against his coming to-night. And, as soon as we are alone, I must make Algernon listen to reason."

But while she was thus comforting herself over the card-table, Andrew Barnett, the well-known jeweller, was mopping his hot face in a railwaycarriage. He had been torn from a bed of suffering by the most imperious and pressing of telegrams. "Utmost importance. First-rate expert required. Catch 9.30." He struggled and gurgled with excitement and ill-health.

At Barnby Junction he had to leave the express, and proceed by slow train viâ Lowchester. The night was dark, and pouring wet, a continuous, cold rustle and shimmer. His teeth chattered as he sank down in a compartment of the long semi-goods train that crept away down a sideline. When he opened his eyes over his gasps and groans, he noticed that another passenger had stepped in just as the train started. There were few travelling, the door of this first-class compartment had stood temptingly open. "Do you object," said the new arrival in a genial voice, "to my cigar?" He was a young man, with a healthy, tanned skin and a resolute moustache. The jeweller felt drawn to him, in wretchedness and craving for sympathy; and the young man, on his part, was sufficiently talkative. The reason of the latter's sociability soon made itself known. "I have not been in England for more than a few weeks at a time during the last five years," he said. "I arrived at Southampton this morning. I have come back for good."

Mr. Barnett was too full of his own sufferings to take any interest in other people's doings. He complained bitterly of the manner in which he had been torn from his sick-bed, and ultimately, as the dreary journey lengthened and his sense of injury increased on him, he let out, while carefully suppressing names, the fact that he had been called away, in this unreasonable manner, to give an expert's opinion on jewellery at a moment's

"Some absurd freak!" he grumbled. "Of course, that is the worst of our trade, Sir. We are at the beck and call of our fair clients, noble and otherwise." He laughed cynically: "Noble and otherwise, ha!"

"I suppose so," replied the other. "Still, diamond-selling is a goodenough business, I should say, over here."

"I don't deny it," said the other; "in spite of bad debts and risks. But a man who doesn't know anything about diamonds can't imagine what ticklish things they are to handle. It's all very well to say an expert. The only expert you can trust's yourself."

"I suppose so," assented the young man indifferently. He looked out of the window into the darkness. The diamond-merchant sighed laboriously. "It is murder," he wailed, "to fetch a sick man out of his bed on such a night as this." He grew visibly worse and more wretched, coming to pieces, his face a pale green. He complained bitterly that in his perturbation he had come away without brandy. At Lowchester he hurried out into the wet and down a gangway in search of some. When the train started, he had not reappeared.

On the young traveller this sudden turn of affairs had an amazing effect. He breathed hard, and his colour came and went. With eager fingers he hunted up time-tables, and proved to his satisfaction that this was the last train on the line that night. "And telegrams are out of the question," he said to himself, "at this hour to an out-of-the-way hole like Burton Lees." He knew the destination of the missing man, for he had accidentally heard him inquire of the guard, when changing at Barnby. And putting two and two together, he could easily conclude it was from Rockingham that the summons had gone forth to the incautious jeweller. He lay back in the carriage, as the train crept from tiny station to station. He knew this part of the world from his childhood: twice during his brief home-comings he had stayed here of late years when Lord Rockingham was away. Now, evidently, the great man was at home. The young traveller breathed hard, his colour came and went.

The train drew up with a jerk at Burton Lees. The solitary traveller looked out into the pattering rain. No one stirred. With a sudden impulse

he flung himself out of the carriage. His mind was made up.

The guard came running up. "Next station's yours, Sir," he cried.

"I've changed my mind," said the young fellow quite fiercely. "I'm going to get out here."

Even as he spoke a servant in shiny dripping waterproof approached. "Mr. Barnett?" asked the man.

"From Mr. Barnett," replied the traveller. He felt a little nervous as he got into the waiting wagonette. And indeed he might. But he had seen many bold moves in the queer land he came from, and the boldest, as a rule, had succeeded best.

Still, as he waited a few moments in the spacious, dimly-lit library, he pressed tight against his bosom the letter hidden in his coat-pocket—a bracing treatment which he felt he most certainly required.

"Come—has he?" said Lord Rockingham, and trumped his mother's best card. "We will just finish."

"Of course," said Sir George. He was cross, for both ladies had played very badly.

"I shall go to him alone!" decreed Rockingham, rising as soon as the game was over. His mother cast a beseeching glance at him, but he was

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looking another way. Then, suddenly, she saw the foolishness of his move, for, if driven to desperation, she could always suggest his having tampered with the jeweller.

But he realised this also. At any rate, he turned by the door and addressed the shrinking girl in the arm-chair. "After all," he said, "you and I are the parties most concerned. Supposing we hear what this man says together?'

She got up and followed him. The man in the distance of the library bowed low. "Mr. Barnett was prevented from coming," he said. "So I came

At the sound of his voice Mabel Prescott, who was someway behind Rockingham, swayed as if she would have fallen. She leant up against

"You know about diamonds, I presume?" said Lord Rockingham.

"I do, my Lord."

A strong box, taken out of the safe, had been brought downstairs and placed on a side table. Lord Rockingham turned on a full glare of electric light. He threw back the lid and extracted a couple of trays. The famous family jewels lay glittering, almost as lovely as the spray of a waterfall in sunlight, a stupid splendour, the envious adoration of womankind.

"Look at these," said Lord Rockingham. "They are supposed to be the finest diamonds within a circuit of a hundred miles!" He spoke as if to the jeweller, but his aim was the girl.

She, while he was busy with the lock, had thrown herself past the other man with one hurried word, "Save!" She now stood motionless.

"You must allow me to examine them more closely, my Lord," said the expert. He went to the table and took up a pendant.

"It is impossible, of course," he said presently in a shaky voice, "to speak with absolute certainty. I can only give you an expert's opinion to-night.'

"Well, give that," said Lord Rockingham roughly.

The young man from Mr. Barnett's turned and twisted the jewels in the light. He took up various pieces in succession and laid them down again.

Lord Rockingham stood outwardly impassive, but he thought the young man's manner strange, and his desultory examination not calculated to inspire confidence in his final judgment. At last Mabel, who was also watching intently, gave a nervous little cough.

At this sound the expert started: he laid down the massive necklace.

"These diamonds are genuine," he said.

Lord Rockingham leapt to the door and cried out to the others in the drawing-room. They came hurrying forward.

"I came here to say they were not," continued the unknown visitor; "but, look here, I can't lie about it like this. The diamonds are genuine enough, Lord Rockingham. All the same, you don't marry Mabel Prescott."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried Lord Rockingham.

"Harry! God bless my soul-Harry Stretton!" spluttered Sir George.

The true lover had drawn his love towards his bosom. She lay there, with, between her cheek and his beating heart, the agonised confession he had found awaiting him in London: a renunciation, an explanation, a hopeless prayer for pity, which had drawn him irresistibly on.

"The stones are genuine enough," continued Harry coolly; "but their value has been greatly overrated. They are Cape diamonds, yellow, of the poorer kind, a hundred years old. If they are the finest in this neighbourhood, you are not well off for jewels. Fifty English peeresses have better, not to speak of the rich Jews. Give me three years' time, uncle, and I'll get you as good, and better, for Mabel here." He bent down and kissed the brow against his shoulder. She looked up and suddenly threw her arms about his neck and returned the embrace.

The moment that happened a complete change—a dull flame of derision—came over Lord Rockingham's eyes.

"I-I have passed my word to Lord Rockingham," stammered Sir

"I fling it back in your face," said Lord Rockingham. THE END.

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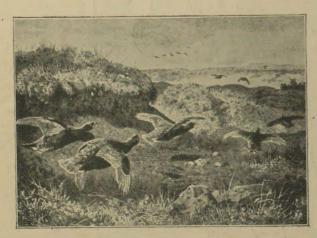


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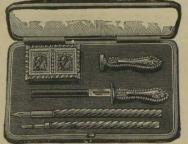
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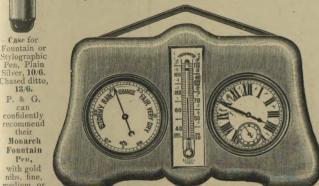


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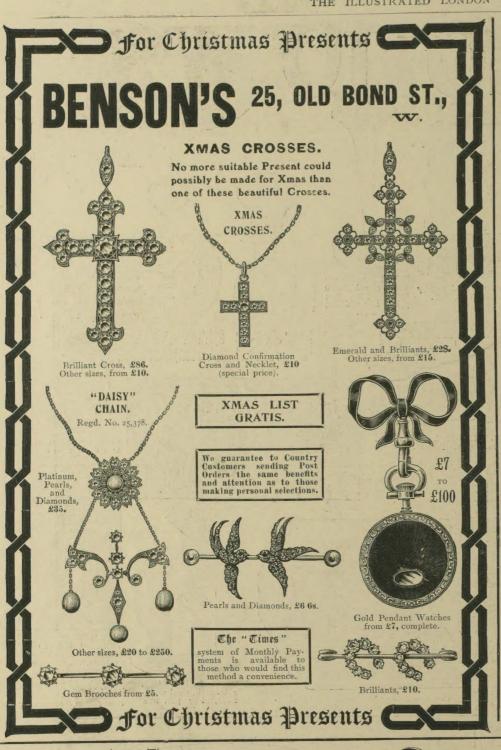
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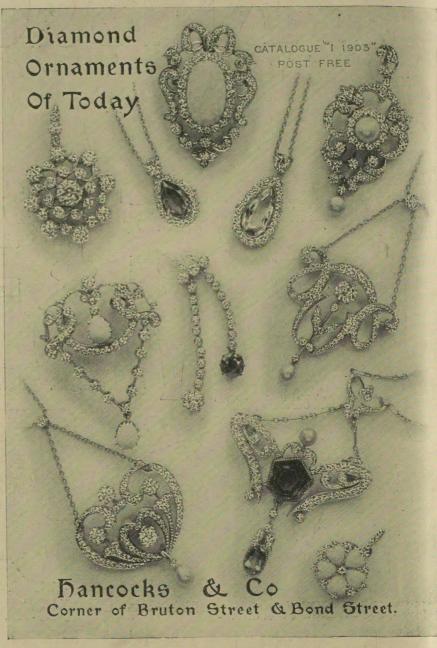






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